My second auto ethnography is focused on those with grandparents still in their lives and the effect it has on the lives of us, the younger generation. Some have Grandparents that live close others are lucky if they can visit twice a year. Grandparents are filled with years of history and experiences that often goes untold. The stories and backgrounds of our elders in fact, shape our lives. I decided to dive in and explore, through my interviews, the positive ways having grandparents has changed the lives of kids as well as share my own stories. I am lucky to have three living grandparents with unique relationships to them all. Although their contributions and power they have brought to my life is indescribable, the information put in my auto ethnography will hopefully open the eyes of many who forget the value of grandparents or simply never realized the large effect they can have on our lives.

Part of the reason my grandfather grew into the person he is today is because of how and where he grew up. My grandfather from my dad’s side of the family came from a small town in southeast Poland named Ilja. He is one hundred and two years old, born in 1911. He was the youngest of 5 children in his family with two boys and three girls. His father owned a grocery store, which at the time was a typical occupation for Jewish men. He also did the ritual circumcism for the town. Religion was very important to his family. Although he went to a Jewish elementary school and later a Yeshiva, his education stopped when he turned eighteen and was drafted into the Polish army. I have one picture of my grandpa in his Polish uniform that I always think of when he tells me he was in the army. It is the only one he has. When he was drafted was when Germany invaded Poland during World War two leading him to be captured as a prisoner of war. Eventually, he was released back to his family. When Germany invaded my grandfathers town, the Jewish people were boarded onto trains that were heading for concentration camps, camps where Jewish people along with other minorities were forced to live, given roughly ninety calories a day, endless labor and constant fear. My grandfather found a way to escape the train platform. The rest of his family was sent off and did not survive the war. He met my grandmother when he was in a labor camp during the war. There, he met my grandmother’s family. We call them the "munchkins" in the family because they were all short and petite. Throughout the time he lived in the labor camp, he managed to keep a religious garment called Teffilin, which he even took to the United States and still has today. My uncle was born in a displaced persons camp after the war and my father was born when my grandpa came to America a few years after. From there the next generation began.

My grandparents on my other side of the family had an extremely different culture growing up. My grandmother on my mother’s side of the family is eighty-seven years old and was born to two parents of Hungarian decent. They lived in Astoria, Queens with many other Hungarians. She lived in a very foreign household, with both parents who attended night school to learn and improve their English. My Grandma Rita went to an English school and spoke only English to her friends and teachers but when inside her own house she spoke Hungarian. She went to Sunday school to learn about her Jewish heritage. Women during her time were very fixed on fashion and were raised to entertain well. For their own entertainment they listened to the radio that told stories as if they were movies and the listeners would paint imagery in their heads as they listened. My grandma always speaks with a smile when she talks to me about the radio. Every summer, the entire family would go to Far Rockaway as a tradition. My grandma was one of few women who not only went but also graduated from college. She graduated Brooklyn College and became a first grade teacher for many years; she still corrects me and my cousins on our grammar mistakes daily. On the other hand, my grandfather on my mother’s side we call "Papa", because my oldest cousin was unable to pronounce grandpa when he was young. His mother was an American originally from Philadelphia and his father was born in Romania. They met and lived in Ridgewood, Queens. Later their family moved to the Bronx. My papa grew up during the time of the Great Depression. He worked from the age of ten years old. He would give his parents the money he earned and then they would give him some spending money. He grew up in a very Americanized society with relatives that attended the military academy. He served in the U.S army when he was eighteen years old and fought during World War One. When he returned from the army he attended ST. Johns University and only took classes at night because he worked all day. He got a CPA and became an accountant. He had one brother and their relationship was not always steady and close. He created his own accounting firm years after college and eloped with my grandma when they were in their 20'a.

Often families have rituals that are passed on from generation to generation but the source of them is forgotten. My grandparents have lived through years of history and those traditions are little artifacts that came from their lives before our modern world. My family has an annual tradition that every December during Christmas time, we all make the trip from New York to Maui, Hawaii. The first time my mother’s family went was when she was fifteen years old. My grandparents fell in love with it so much they decided to go back the following year; and the next 50 after that. We have stayed at the same exact beach every year even as the years go on and the family grows. It is the time of year all 9 of my cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents have almost two full weeks to spend together by their sides instead of a simple thanksgiving dinner. When my parents got engaged they were going to plan the wedding during December vacation because at first it seemed like the most convenient. When my papa was told this information, the December dates were no longer an option. It seems crazy that he wouldn't want the wedding during that time but the time spent in Hawaii and the memories created there he and my grandma could not give up. This cherished tradition, that no matter where we all are in the world or what state we attend college, we all congregate in Maui at the same time every year. This tradition is similar to that of my grandmother’s family and Far Rockaway. Without all of these years of trekking twelve hours to a tropical island my family would not be as close and we would not have all the memories of my grandparents we do. It has taught the grandchildren to act almost as siblings and grow close to each other. It has also given us an appreciation for our grandparents always holding our families together. My grandparents are constantly telling us stories as a hope to guide us. From my oldest cousin who is twenty-seven to my youngest cousin at six years old, they have imprinted in us values through their talks and actions. They always explain how fortunate we are to be able to come together. I sometimes overlook the importance of the little events that make them so happy. They are almost reaching ninety years old and each year the trip to Hawaii becomes harder to make. It makes me as well as my cousins realize we cannot take them or the lessons they give us for granted. We have to cherish the new years eves on the beach and the phone calls at home. My grandpa on my father’s side has nine grandchildren as well and eight great grandchildren. He has had an incredible impact on our lives but through a more silent way. Because of his age of one hundred and two it is extremely difficult for him to recognize people in our family especially those of us who are younger and were not around during his earlier years. He has been devoted to family and religion his entire life. When I visit him, he often does not know who I am but if I recite any line from a religious text, he will finish the entire book. This devotion speaks to me. It is one of the few things that stayed with him so clearly through over a century. His presence shapes our family. He teaches us modesty and the value of life and family we should all have. He may only repeat many of the same lines when I get to see him, but there is so much more hidden behind that we learn from. His care for our family brings tears to my every time I see him. His importance to his courage and us even the little cousins can recognize. On his birthdays he always receives presents from the family, but I think what he really wants is to be able to be with us all. I wish he could notice the influence he has had on us.

To get a better perspective on how the younger generation feels empowered, or doesn’t, by their grandparents I interviewed two people. First I interviewed Emmy Panken. Emmy talked about the influence her two living grandparents have had on her life and the close relationship she’s had with them. Emmy is a freshman at the University of Wisconsin who I have known my whole life. I know she is very comfortable with her grandparents who I have met myself multiple times. I thought it would be interesting to hear her thoughts about their impact on her. I asked Emmy to tell me a little about their relationship. " My grandparents are my little bundles of joy." I then went on to ask what she admired about them. She immediately responded with "I am in awe of their ever-constant positive attitudes despite the challenges they have overcome and are still experiencing. Anytime I call them, they have this power to instantly make me smile and start hysterical laughing on the phone regardless of where I am or what I’m doing." I asked if there was a specific memory that she thinks of when she first thinks of her grandparents. "Each time I laugh around my grandma, she repeats, “I love that laugh.” My grandparents are the two people in the world who I can go to with a problem, or with an upsetting situation and they automatically help me feel calm and safe, making the conflict seem minute." Her grandparents are a safety zone for her. They are the people she wants to include in her accomplishments and daily life. She knows they will always be there for her and will never get angry or discourage her. "They manage to make me feel proud of myself even when I have failed. The first people I call when I get a good grade on a test are my grandparents. Just recently, I received a 99 on my international relations midterm and I immediately dialed their number. They were overjoyed and started screeching on the phone, they couldn’t contain their happiness." They are always motivating her to continue succeeding. To me, it seems they are the voices inside her head that tell her what is right from wrong. She continued to say "Soon enough the lecture started, where they excitedly explained how I would go on to achieve great success in this area and have a rich career. Anytime I have any history or English questions I know I can turn to them. Even if I don’t actually need help, I know they love to feel needed and the joy they get out of me going to them for help is worth the extra phone call." "For instance, in middle school I had a project where I needed to interview my grandparents about their childhoods and compare their stories to my own. As a result of this project, I gained a deeper appreciation for my grandparents and their drive to succeed. Both my grandfather and grandmother grew up in lower class homes without any safety net, and it was up to them to create their own success. Although I can’t pin point each specific way in which my grandparents have influenced me, I would argue that they have had a greater impact on my dedication to my studies, my extroverted personality, and my love of laughing than I realize. They have always been there for me and I know that no matter how hard I fall and what mistakes I make, they will be there to build me back up."

Afterwards, I interviewed Vanessa Shnay, who was passionate about her grandfather’s history. Vanessa shared her feelings about the positive values her Papi has imprinted on her life and how their relationship has helped her grow. Vanessa shared with me her grandfather’s story of his past in order to convey to me the power he has had on her and the way she views life.

"My grandfather has influenced my life tremendously. 204,000 Jews passed through the town of Lodz where he came from during World War Two and only 10,000 of those survived. The odds that my grandfather survived were less than 5 percent." I asked if that small percentage has ever struck her or how that slight chance changes her ways of appreciating her papi. "It shows me how I am so lucky that my grandfather survived and it was clearly for a reason." Vanessa believes because her grandfather was so lucky that it is her duty to live life to the fullest, the way he would want her to. " I've learned from my grandfather never to take life for granted because I am so lucky to be here today." " My grandfather has taught me that life has meaning and purpose," Her papi serves as a role model to her. She admires all that he does and everything he has been through. An extremely large part of how she views the world and how to live her own life is based on her grandpa’s experiences. Whether it is from the stories he has shared with her or the unspoken fact that it is so lucky that he is here today, he has an impact and carries an immense amount of weight in many of her life decisions. "My grandfather has taught me that life has meaning and purpose. He is here for a reason and it is my job to find that reason and make meaning of my life that I am lucky to have." He shows Vanessa that life is short, and to live it to the very fullest. Vanessa is on a gap year now taking advantage of all she can and living a life of contentment and enjoyment. Her papi shows her by the way he has lead his life since he was a young boy that it is always possible to build up from tragedies. " He shows me that no matter how bad or horrible the circumstance we are in, we could always get out of it and rebuild our lives because life is too short and precious not to."

For the kids, it is not until they are older that they realize the bigger picture of how important it is to cherish grandparents, if they even ever do. To us, sometimes it is the little things; the teddy bear, the repeated story, the re-occurring dessert they make during family gatherings or any other unique simplicities that grandparents do for their children. We tend to keep these for a very long time if not the rest of our lives. In the video it also shows children explaining how knowledgeable grandparents really are. Even small children can reckegnize the wisdom that comes from our elders' histories. I am always most fascinated with my grandparents' past, especially their lifestyle back then. As a grandchild of three living grandparents, though, the first memories that come to my mind are the small re-occurring stories I hear and the mini treats they give me. Those are the symbols to me that show each of their personalities and relationships with me. I can carry them with me for the rest of my lifetime. Never once have I walked into my grandparent’s house without my grandma insisting I eat chocolates she has or bought because she knew I was coming. She knows I love chocolate, which of course means every time I see her she feels she must give me pounds of it. It is the first thing she remembers to do when I walk through the door. Since I was little I have always remembered my grandpas infamous sugar cookies. When we would go see him there would always be the only sugar cookies I've ever liked. He also always holds my hand when I visit him now, he is blind and so feeling is a way to connect. He will always hold it tight and ask if I'm eating. It feels small to him and he wants to confirm I have enough because he did not always when he grew up through a war. It is these memories that stick with us and make us really appreciate who we came from.

A conflict that most parents face is the way they will raise their children. They want to engrave in their children the principles that will make them good-hearted people as they grow up.  In today’s day, there is more mobility available, which can lead to more visits between families. Grandparents are able to see their grandchildren more. It also means that families are more spread out leading to more difficulty in seeing grandchildren. In the article "Grandparents today" the author conveys that being a grandparent comes with the thought of old age which is not a positive one in our "youth obsessed" world. Although grand parenting is attached to the word old, it is not about age but rather generations. Being a grandparent is giving people a second chance to parent. It allows grandparents to fix mistakes they felt they made and teach lessons and values without the stress that comes with parenting. Grand parents can also be a very big help towards parent’s especially new parents. It has been found that they are actually fundamental in some areas of the grandchildren's lives. Specifically in helping them form their own identities and teaching them values as well as beliefs. Identity is a difficult thing for children to understand and create. Grandparents have an immense impact on grandchildren when it comes to finding their identities. A child without relationships with family members in other generations may lack a sense of culture or even self. This lack of relationships sometimes yields children that are less developed in the area of identity and do not have as good of a grasp of where they come from. Grandparents also can act as the historian of the family, informing the rest of the family about their experiences and the family lineage. With society becoming slightly negative, grandchildren need a positive role model in their lives. Children are constantly trying to find someone to emulate and creating a strong relationship with a grandparent can cause them to become that role model. Studies have shown the effectiveness of strengthening the relationships between family members in different generations.

Our grandparents start caring for us from day one. When I was younger my grandparents were physically capable of doing anything. They drove their cars daily and could walk anywhere. My grandpa was able to have full conversations. As time goes on and people age the daily routines become harder for them. My grandma is half blind and cannot drive anymore. My papa has trouble walking and my grandpa is blind as well. Every year my cousins and I discuss how hard it must be for them and how important it is to remember these times, as they are all reaching very old ages. That is what inspired my topic for this auto ethnography. It is a way to reach out to those who forget about important topics like this that cannot be found on the news or in magazines. It is the reminder people might need for an important "current event" in their lives. With all of the hectic activities going on through people's lives, we forget about how much time we may have left and all of the morals we've been taught by our grandparents. Now in 2014, they are in much different conditions than they were when I was young though their influence on me has only gotten greater. I will continue to gain from them and execute their values of education, religion and a good moral code. One theme I hope will reach people when they read both my auto ethnographies on my website is that everyone, although day-by-day we all tend to become absorbed in our own life and thoughts, has their own unique story. Even our grandparents, who contain so much history that they seem older and ultimately all similar because of that characteristic, have their very own past. These stories make them who they are and eventually shape the next generation too. In our fast paced society we forget to appreciate people for who they are. Instead many times people point out the small details that bother them in a person or a thing. I wanted to bring to people’s attention that whether it is through my strange commuting high school experience or reflecting on the importance of my grandparents, I have found ways to see that everyone builds their own life. Each person has some very lucky and very unfortunate situations that occur in their life. Don't pick out the bad in everything, look and act on the good in everyone and in every experience that comes along in the journey through our lives.