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## **Mom Told Me To Grow Up And Win The Nobel Prize** Val Gerstle

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## Val Gerstle

### MOM TOLD ME TO GROW UP AND WIN THE NOBEL PRIZE

Mom told me to grow up and win the Nobel Prize. She taught me how to check my breasts for cancer and made sure I knew who Cezanne was. When I was 16 put on cologne that smelled like chrysanthemums and let a pornographer take pictures of me sitting in icy water that made my nipples stick out like chimneys. On weekends he took me to the Parkette Drive-in. I saw "Kill and Be Killed" six times. The year I turned 18 got an apartment with a carpet, and took to wearing kneesocks and stickpins. A football player who became an insurance salesman after he tore the ligaments in his knee married me late that summer. The wedding was small, but I got a hotpad set, pink toilet cover, yogurt maker and fly-zapper. My parents sent us to Sarasota for the honeymoon. A year later I was bored with diapers and daytime TV, so I took a plane to California and changed my name and hair color. I met a wiry young woman who was doing research work with carrier pigeons. Since she was middle-class and I suddenly wasn't, she took me to lunch at a place with dark air and leather seats and stone jugs. We drank beer and she gave me a key to her apartment so I could have someplace decent to eat sandwiches and take showers and sleep. Then I went uptown and got a job as a typist in an ad agency. The Director liked me because I was young and didn't talk and typed fast. I was happy bringing home a paycheck each weekend. I made just enough to buy soap and sandwiches and a couple more tulip print dresses, and occasionally a luxury, like a bracelet for the scientist on her birthday. We put on our pajamas and sat in front of the TV and celebrated with crab-meat soup and gin straight from the bottle.