

## SOULINKS: Connecting Past and Future

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Life is a series of connections and relationships of all shapes, sizes and contexts. Some are desired, some are not. Some are intentional, others are surprises. Some are family, but most extend beyond blood boundaries. And some extend beyond peer and generational bounds. These are the relationships that have captured my attention, and my heart.

There are many terms for these relationships that leap across generations. We call them multi-generational, cross-generational or inter-generational, and all play a role in the study of something we call intergenerationality and human geography. For thousands of years we have relied upon the wisdom and experiences of those generations that came before us to enrich our own wisdom and knowledge. But lately the cross-generational relationship has been placed on the list of "endangered species."

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There are a number of reasons for this, including the fragility of today's family structures, cultural and values differences and, perhaps the biggest generational gap generator – technology. We seem to be losing our ability to communicate face-to-face, develop social skills, and promote personal relationships. Now it's all done with our fingertips, separated, remote and distant. Personal relationships are moving over in favor of digital – and impersonal – relationships. I read an article recently that made the bold statement that we are the most affluent society ever, yet we are also the most depressed, isolated and addicted society ever. *Wow. That should tell us something needs our attention – fast.*

Studies, including one that got my attention from the Department of Sociology and the Institute on Aging at Boston College, have shown that today's "elder" generation is more depressed and isolated than at any other time in history. They believe they have become "irrelevant" and unneeded. And today's young adults are also depressed and disheartened more than ever, because they are fearful about their futures and haven't lived enough life to see there are ways through these hard times. The solution to this situation seems obvious, doesn't it?

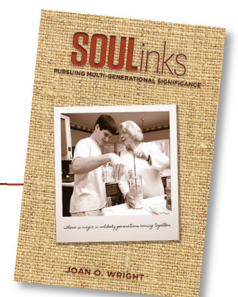
The older population feels irrelevant because they believe they've outlived their usefulness – they have lived too long. The younger adult generation hasn't lived long enough to help them successfully navigate into their future. Depression, sadness, and despair were shared by *both* generations, but can be *banished* for both when the two generations meet up. It is like a beautiful, logical mathematical equation. It makes perfect sense.

So why does all this matter to me? Why is it so important that I would eventually write a book about it? Let me tell you a very short story...

In 2004 our local newspaper *The Charlotte Observer*, ran an article which began "*Years ago, a young boy's next door neighbor invited him to watch her in the kitchen. Now he could be the city's most promising young chef.*" This article continued to tell readers about an unlikely multi-generational friendship that lasted over 20 years. The glue that bonded them was a love of cooking. At a very early age Andrew would run to the kitchen next door whenever he liked and over the course of the next two decades, became the executive sous chef at the world acclaimed restaurant "The Inn at Little Washington" in Virginia. All because of a very unique, unexpected multi-generational relationship filling the needs of both people.

Oh, one more thing. Andrew is our son. I have personally experienced the extraordinary power of cross-generational relationships. And after I heard the results of the study by Boston College on the remarkable mutual benefits of these relationships, I knew I had my next passionate calling. I set to work interviewing other people who shared these kinds of relationships. At the time, I had no idea the end result (*not the end, the beginning I hope!*) would be a little but life-changing book titled "SOULinks: Pursuing Multi-Generational Significance." This is a book of true stories intended to touch your heart, then call you into action.

I would like to challenge you – young or old – to pursue significance by reaching out across generations, regardless of the presence (*or lack*) of a "blood" connection (*family*) to seek and embrace multi-generational relationships wherever you can find them. The mutual benefits are surprising and welcome, adding a layer of richness to our lives that nothing else can. And in many cases, like Andrew's, they will *change* lives.



"SOULinks: Pursuing Multi-Generational Significance" is a new book written by Joan O. Wright, filled with stories about real people who have discovered the joys of cross-generational relationships.