

# [***I'm a 51-year-old Grandma Who Skipped Motherhood***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0J-6NP1-DY68-10M2-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 959 words

**Byline:** Jen Rudin

**Highlight:** If the journey to parenthood were a race, I avoided training: Pregnancy, morning sickness, childbirth—and that's the easy part.

**Body**

"Go go, Grandma Jenny!"

I saw my husband and stepdaughter yelling and waving in the distance, holding a bright yellow sign with green letters.

It was mile nine of the New York City marathon. I stopped for a moment, doing a double-take. *Was that me they were referring to?*

Rushing to meet my family, I hugged my husband, Andy, took a quick picture, kissed our one-year-old grandson, Rocky, and continued running.

I'm a 51-year-old grandma who skipped motherhood. If the journey to parenthood were a race, I avoided all the training: Pregnancy, morning sickness, childbirth, and making chicken soup—and that's just the easy part.

As teenagers growing up in New York City, my older sister and I listened to *Free to Be...You and Me* on repeat on our plastic orange record player.

Our liberal parents encouraged us to pursue our passions: my sister became a Rabbi like our father, and I was the black sheep destined for a career in show business—but they still wanted grandchildren.

A casting director in Los Angeles, at 31, I turned to the cute guy behind me in line for the lavatory on a [*JetBlue*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/jetblue?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) flight from JFK to LA. "So many screaming children on this flight," I said sarcastically. "Where are their parents?"

He laughed, replying: "There's a playdate in my row. I'm on my second beer."

When we landed, I shook out my hair and said hello to him at baggage claim, even though I'd carried on. A year later, he proposed to me at the same baggage claim and we took out a loan to buy a historic apartment in Pasadena.

He was the youngest of five from a large Methodist family and wanted to start a family once we were married. I stalled, insisting we wait until I got promoted at my job.

I didn't know if I wanted to be a mother. Could I give my whole self to a tiny human who relied on me? I didn't even know how to hold a baby. If only I could skip the early years of parenthood and cast a ten-year-old to play my child.

My father, the Rabbi, expressed his deep concern about how we would raise our children. Leading a Passover seder for my fiancé's extended family in our Pasadena apartment six months before our wedding, my father held up a piece of matza. "Who knows what this is?"

"I do!" My fiancé's seven-year-old niece piped up. "It's the body of Christ, and the wine is his blood."

Although my father had led hundreds of interfaith Passover seders, he was speechless.

My sister, Rabbi Eve, jumped in. "That's right, Hannah. That's what it means in your religion, but tonight, we are celebrating a Jewish holiday. Are there any other questions?"

Hannah's 11-year-old brother held up a fork. "Is this a Jewish fork?"

I pushed down our differences in religion and ***politics*** and walked down the aisle a few months later. My new husband stepped on a glass, and we married under a chuppah, but I knew our marriage was doomed.

While I stayed on the pill and focused on my job, he started an expensive remodel, room by room, for our historic apartment in Pasadena. Once he created the perfect home, he planned to flip it to buy a bigger house to make room for our children.

Busy with the renovation, he said: "Let's name our daughter Julia." Then he removed our bathroom sink and added: "I'll build a stage and do puppet shows for our kids."

By day, he demolished each room in our apartment. At night, our disagreements about ***politics***, our differences in religion, and how to raise children began to tear apart our marriage.

The economy and our marriage collapsed. There was debt and foreclosure. There was never a puppet stage. There was no baby. Once the certified divorce papers came, my ex demanded I never contact him again.

Divorced and in debt at 35, I took a lateral move for my job that brought me back to New York City. On the flight to JFK, seated in a row next to a young family with two screaming kids,

I closed my eyes and cried the entire flight, grieving the family I'd never have. This time at baggage claim, there was nothing but my broken heart.

At night alone, I couldn't push down my fears and shake the feeling that if I didn't have a family, I'd end up alone and die quietly next to a half-eaten bowl of instant oatmeal, *Law and Order: SVU* on a loop in the background.

Then, just before turning 40, I met Andy. Seventeen years older, divorced, with two grown daughters in their twenties, friends were concerned about the age difference.

My mother saw the plus side: "Thank God his girls are older. Now, you don't have to get stuck going to the zoo."

I'd finally met the man I could have a baby with and bonus, he was Jewish and a Democrat. But Andy made it clear he was not interested in having more kids.

Ultimately, I chose Andy. At 43, my Rabbi sister officiated under a chuppah. I made peace with my decision to be child-free by choice. I'd finally found an incredible man to play my husband. This time, it felt right.

My oldest stepdaughter gave birth to Rocky in 2021. When Rocky was a newborn, I sat on the sidelines, watching Andy and his ex-wife hold him—after all, I was only his step-grandma.

But when Andy placed Rocky into my arms for the first time, he showed me how to hold and support his tiny head, reminding me that Rocky would see me as the same; all six grandparents are equal.

It wasn't a competition for who loved him more.

Rocky will become a big brother in June, and we can't wait to meet his sibling. I may have skipped parenthood, but in a great surprise ending, becoming a grandma is my best role yet.

*Jen Rudin is the author of* [*Confessions of a Casting Director*](https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.amazon.com%2Fdp%2F0062292099%2Fkeywords%3Dacting%3Ftag%3Dharpercollinsus-20&data=05%7C02%7Cs.croucher%40newsweek.com%7C5e0b827aeba946e8368608dc691a4994%7Cc6bc3eb5d7334f82ba021aa6e30053d3%7C0%7C0%7C638500808849796705%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ufbkPnDXEBcjGB%2BvucdBwCfUiZtSHzzCKsxOO5YBru0%3D&reserved=0)*, published by HarperCollins. She lives in New York City and is working on a memoir.*

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[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2388945/jen-rudin-grandson-rocky.jpg)

**Graphic**

Jen Rudin grandson Rocky

Jen Rudin

Left and right: Jen Rudin with her grandson, Rocky.

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