

The Sandwich Generation

In 1981 the term “Sandwich Generation” was coined as a way to describe those people who are caring for both aging parents and school age children simultaneously. Chip Walton, who directs *The Luckiest People*, coined his own phrase for this phenomenon: The Sahara of Middle Age. Chip, who freely admits he is walking his own Sahara today, likes the imagery of the Sahara (and the Nomads who wander it) as a metaphor for this complicated and often isolating time of one’s life.

“Sahara” means ‘the greatest desert’ in Arabic, fitting as the middle years of our lives often force us to confront the greatest challenges and decisions of our lives. On the first day of rehearsal, Chip shared with the cast that while we think of the Sahara as a great, barren emptiness, it is actually made up of a variety of dunes, sand seas, mountains, rivers, stone, and oases. For the director, “This tremendous diversity in geography and landscape also reflects how so many different factors – growing children, aging parents, personal dreams and fears, professional careers, and our closest relationships – impact the middle years of our lives.”

While it may feel isolating, the fact is that those caught in the Sandwich Generation are not alone – about 15% of middle aged adults provide financial support to both an

aging parent and a child. Playwright Meridith Friedman got the idea to explore this period of change after watching her parents care for her two sets of grandparents while also raising her. She shared, “You’ve never seen four people so unhappy to be living in Hawaii [where they moved to be with Meridith’s family.]”

The issue is so pervasive that the Pew Research Center tackled the topic in their 2013 report - *The Sandwich Generation: Rising Financial Burdens for Middle-Aged Americans*. They found that about three-quarters of those in the Sandwich Generation are 40-59 years old, but 19% are actually younger than 40 when they find themselves caring for both ends of the life spectrum. Interestingly, this study also found that 75% of Americans believe adult children are obligated to provide financial assistance to an aging parent if needed.

Whether you call it a Sandwich or a Sahara, the middle years of one’s life are plagued by responsibilities – to kids, parents, spouses, and society. Those pressures are universal and indiscriminating. *The Luckiest People* and the two plays that will follow it find the humor and the poignancy in the challenging phase of our lives.



At Curious, our plays don't stop when the curtain call is done. We want to you to engage with us. **Feel. Learn. Take Action.** We've got more resources online to help in your exploration. Hit the Go Deeper tab to continue the journey...

www.CuriousTheatre.org/the-luckiest-people/