

My Mother, Myself is an ongoing exploration of my relationship with my mother and the dynamics of parental relationships. No one teaches us how to parent, so we pass on to our children what we have learned mostly subconsciously from our parents. We often don't question the techniques that were used to discipline us, even if we rebelled against them, hated them or felt humiliated by these techniques at the time. There is a Larry Sultan quote I love from his work "Pictures from Home." "You build a small corral and the horse is going to kick it down." I always felt as though my mother was smothering me, trying to hold me back. I felt suffocated by her moods and authority, the way I felt in the winter as a child when the heat was turned up full blast in the car and I would press my face to the window glass just to get some cooling relief, to feel like I could breathe. I always felt that I was the problem child - always too much or too little - always being blamed for everything - the black sheep, the bad kid. I was the child who did everything wrong out of the four of us. My siblings still believe that I was the problem child and that the problem lies with me and not with how we were parented. We find ourselves falling into patterns we would like to shake off to break the cycle. How do we become self-aware enough to do this? In my own experience, I have struggled with this as a mother. I vowed never to be like my authoritarian parents (more specifically my mother who was the disciplinarian in our family) when I became a young mother unexpectedly at the age of nineteen. I made the mistake of waffling back and forth between an authoritative and permissive parenting style with my older son. I learned from my mistakes with him and have become a much better parent with my younger son who

was born when I was 28. Growing up, I never knew what would set my mother off, only that she had a short fuse. It could be a word, a glance, a touch. My sense of humor clashed with her lack of one and everything was taken literally by her as an offense against her. Jokes were not tolerated. Her response would be disproportionately angry to the stimulus; she was often angry with no cause. She could go from yelling to happy like the flip of a light switch, darkening or brightening the room with her moods. Appearances were paramount - as long as we appeared to be a happy, normal family to the rest of the neighborhood and to the extended family at events, everything was fine. The photographs in this project are an exploration of traumatic memories from my childhood. Through this exploration, I have realized that I am at best an unreliable narrator, as my siblings and I don't remember the same events and the shared events we collectively remember are all colored by our own perspectives and biases. I have also come to see how my mother's parenting was shaped by her mother, who became neglectful and a hoarder after losing an infant son to meningitis. And so my grandmother's trauma was passed on to my mother who passed it on to me.