

Family Squeeze: Tales of Hope and Hilarity for a Sandwiched Generation

By Phil Callaway

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You've been warned about middle-age spread. But no one told you about the squeeze.

You're in the "Middle Ages"–sandwiched between the "greatest generation" and the "gimme" generations, busily juggling both with no relief in sight. Children are driving, and parents are not. Money is tight and so are your favorite jeans. And things that never ached before are beginning to give you trouble! For every baby boomer who wonders if it's possible to navigate the Middle Ages with grace and style, Phil Callaway offers plenty of hope and a little hilarity, too. Because there's nothing like a smile to make wrinkles less noticeable.

The author of *Who Put My Life on Fast Forward?* and *Laughing Matters* offers this lighthearted look at the challenges of the middle years — and promises that while we can't slow down the aging process, we *can* ease the worries it brings by focusing on what really matters most.

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Editorial Review

Review
“I loved reading this book. *Family Squeeze* is funny; VERY FUNNY and seriously honest. I’m grateful that Phil has transparently shared his life so we baby boomers could be reminded how to leave footsteps worth following.”
—BRIAN DOERKSEN, worship leader and author of “Come, Now Is the Time” and “Faithful One”

“I laughed and cried and identified wholly as I read *Family Squeeze.* Phil Callaway has the gift of using gentle humor to convey powerful truth; in this case that family is infinitely worth loving, however difficult the moment, and that God’s grace and strength are the hope that carries us through each day. A must-read for every parent caught in midlife crisis between teenage hormones and aging parents.”
—JEANETTEWINDLE, author of *Crossfire* and *Firestorm*

“I commend to you the sentiments expressed in this volume, not only because we need them and because Phil wrote them, but more importantly because he and Ramona live the grace so humorously articulated here. I’m already planning to move in with them when I retire.”
—TIM CALLAWAY, columnist, pastor, and brother to Phil

“Phil Callaway’s books are not just a pleasure to savor, like eating a perfectly ripe pear. They are full of firm insights that give grace for the daily race, especially when the journey is hard. I loved *Family Squeeze.* If your life is full of children, parents, and everything in between, you’ll love this book too.”
—ELLEN VAUGHN, *New York Times* bestselling author of *It’s All About Him* and *Time Peace*

About the Author
Described as “Dave Barry with a message,” author, speaker, and television host **Phil Callaway** has written twenty books, many of them bestsellers and is a popular speaker at conferences, camps and marriage retreats, coaxing laughter and tears from audiences worldwide. Of his personal accomplishments he rates the following highest: shutting off the TV to listen to his children’s questions (twice), taking out the garbage without being told (once), and convincing his high school sweetheart Ramona to marry him (once).

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One of the most profound prayers I have ever prayed is “Help!” Sometimes it’s as simple as “Help, I cannot find my left shoe.” Or “Help, I cannot find my passport, and I’m second in line.” But lately the prayer has been increasingly desperate, uttered through clenched teeth, because I feel like a pair of wet swim shorts about to be squeezed through one of those ancient wringer washing machines.

On my forty-fourth birthday—the same day Mick Jagger turned sixty-three—I dragged myself out of bed to take my younger son golfing. I could think of no better reason to get up and face old age. As we strolled the course together, whacking a little white ball and sometimes kicking it, Jeff informed me that he was thinking of buying a Ford Mustang and dating a pretty girl. I threw him a Charles Manson look and said I was considering pushing him in the creek. The child lives life like he golfs: carefully planning his attack, then lunging at things and whapping them.

After tallying our scores, we drove to visit my mother, who needs me, among other things, to finish sentences for her. They don’t prepare you for this in college. You learn of ancient languages and philosophy,

but there's no course on what to do when your mother insists that your son's iPod is her hearing aid.

As we visit, Mom hands me her "baby"—a blanket scrunched, twisted, and spilled upon by numerous patrons of the long-term care facility where she now resides. Few know that she was once the author of many books, adored by her children and a dozen women who still call her Mom and mentor. The years have been kind to her relatively unwrinkled face, but her memories are distant now, her mind perpetually fuzzy, frantic at times, like she knows things I don't and wonders if she should burden me with them.

She leans forward, eager to ask me something. "Is your wife—you know—pregnant?"

Jeff snorts.

"No, Mom, not that I know of."

"Did the divorce go through?" It is one of her longer sentences. I shake my head and smile. I, her lastborn son, who has been married to his high school sweetheart since the advent of disco.

While nursing Mom's bundle of blankets, I try to lighten the air with chatter. I tell her of our golf game, of my birthday, which we will celebrate at lunch tomorrow, just the two of us. She is focused on my bald spot now and is holding hands with Jeff. The boy loves his grandma; loved to sit on her lap as she read to him when he was toddling. But he never saw the story ending this way. How quickly his face changes from grin to grimace when we visit her. He leans forward and drapes his other arm across her shoulder.

I am holding the baby with one hand and a steaming cup of herbal tea with the other when my cell phone begins playing the "Hallelujah Chorus." Setting the teacup on a table, I flip the phone open to find things further complicated. Though the connection is bad, I can hear my wife's desperate voice:

"Phil," she sobs, "it's Steve. He—" And the phone goes dead.

Handing the baby to Jeff, I sprint for the nearest landline, praying my favorite prayer. My mind races to keep up with my pulse. Steve, the eldest of our three teens, is on a trip overseas, smack-dab in the middle of one of the world's hot spots. My nightmares of late have been plagued by images of his demise. I dare not think the worst, but now it appears to be upon us. Down the hallway around the corner, I grab the phone but hesitate before dialing.

I suppose this day is a microcosm of our lives the past few years. Dreaming. Dreading. Laughing. Answering the phone a little less eagerly. We are parenting two generations now, wedged between the demands of elderly dependents and energetic teens—neither of whom think you know very much. I attend to my duties begrudgingly at times. I am husband, father, and son. But my résumé also includes psychiatrist, doctor, advisor, and Power of Attorney—which, I assure you, does not come with a lawyer's salary.

I feel like a rookie juggler who has been put in charge of ticket sales, concessions, and training the animals too. Years ago a scholarship sales representative sat us down to threaten us with how much it would cost our kids to go to college. He didn't mention the price of caring for our parents. Most weekends find me traveling near and far helping audiences laugh, telling them where the joy comes from. Yet in those moments of stark honesty I must admit that my stiff upper lip quivers sometimes, that lurking just beneath the smile is a growing sadness. It's the kind of sadness you feel watching the last sunset of fall, knowing that winter is about to stagger in on you.

I dial the number, expecting the worst. The phone rings, and Ramona picks it up. She is more composed now. “I’m sorry,” she says. “It’s just that…Steve called. He has malaria. Sorry, I sort of lost it.”

I am elated. My son has malaria! If I were any good at dancing, I’d break into the salsa right now. Jeff is talking with Grandma when I return, curling her hands in both of his. Already he has learned one of the secrets to a rich life: In dark times, give off light.

“Everything’s fine,” I tell him. “Steve just has malaria.”

He squints at me like I’ve lost my mind. And since Grandma has lost her hearing, he quietly shares what she’s been saying to him.

“So you’ve been stealing her money, eh?” I laugh. “What money?”

The boy is strong but tender, with eager eyes and a hunger for life. But sometimes I wonder if he’s seeing too much of it, if what might be coming scares him. Sometimes I want to shield my children from life. Yet what do you do? Take them only to movies with happy endings? Never buy them a puppy? At least if your heart gets broken, you’ll know you have one.

Out in the car, I ponder this journey we’ve been on the last few glorious and frantic years. I may not know much, but I do know this: We will walk this road together. I have no idea where it will take us, but just as my parents took time for me, I will take time for them. As surely as childhood is about family, old age is family time too. I think of a friend’s advice: *Right foot, left foot, breathe.*

“Help,” I mutter. “I’m squeezed between my parents and my kids.”

And God speaks with words from my younger son, this gift of God who at times I feel like throttling. “So Mom is a basket case, Grandma’s in the loony bin, and Steve has malaria. Other than that, things aren’t bad. Happy birthday, Dad.”

When he talks like this, I want to lock him in a bear hug. “It could be worse,” I say. “My youngest son could start dating.”

“Maybe,” he laughs, cupping his hand out the window against the oncoming wind. His laugh has me thinking I can muster the courage to face a birthday cake with forty-four lit candles. Maybe climb out of bed again tomorrow and move my feet, one at a time.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ella Cook:

Book is to be different per grade. Book for children until adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important normally. The book Family Squeeze: Tales of Hope and Hilarity for a Sandwiched Generation had been making you to know about other understanding and of course you can take more information. It is very advantages for you. The e-book Family Squeeze: Tales of Hope and Hilarity for a Sandwiched Generation is not only giving you a lot more new information but also being your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your own personal spend time to read your reserve. Try to make relationship with the book Family Squeeze: Tales of Hope and Hilarity for a Sandwiched Generation. You

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