

Futures

So your grandmother is a starship now: a quick guide for the bewildered

It's a new beginning. By Marissa Lingen



Old age is full of lifestyle changes! If you're lucky enough to have a close relationship with your elders, the physical, mental and emotional changes they're going through may be confusing or even scary. Don't worry! Our counsellors have guided many families through this process and can answer most of the questions you may have before you get excessively annoying.

What is happening, seriously, what is even happening?

Your grandmother is becoming a starship! She has gone through many phases in her life already – infant, child, teenager, young adult, student, worker, in many cases spouse, parent, retiree. She has had hobbies like knitting, volleyball and carbon mitigation. She has travelled in planetary atmosphere whenever her circumstances allowed. Now she is uploading

her consciousness into a starship! The circle of life is beautiful.

Why does she want to do this?

That's a question that's best asked of your grandmother, but common reasons our starships cite in surveys include: freedom from the normal aches and pains that accompany ageing in a human body; desire to explore the Universe; being tired of atmosphere dependence; and someone close to them is being extremely annoying and they would like a break.

Will she be able to visit me?

Sure! Whenever your grandmother's travels lead her to dock near your planet, which looks from your metadata like it is Earth, she can let you know if she wants to see you, and you can take a trip out to the space station to have a good long visit with her and catch up. In the meantime, you can always exchange letters,

audio and video messages, and any other form of communication your grandmother will accept.

No, but I mean at my house.

Is your house in atmosphere?

Yes, obviously.

Your life may be a happier one if you attempt to make fewer assumptions about people's life choices! In that case, no, your grandmother will not be able to visit your house. This is all for the best since your grandmother will be 15 to 20 times the size of an average home.

Whoa! That's very big!

She will be magnificent.

Will my grandmother have, like, laser guns?

Starships vary extremely. Your grandmother

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may have up to 23 laser cannons and 36 projectile-ready portals, but the projectile portals, as I'm sure you know, are often used for non-weapon purposes, such as sending cargo and passengers to the surface of a planet, moon or other convenient heavenly body such as the surface of a sun.

It is inadvisable to mess with your grandmother at this time.

Will my grandmother have a platoon of space marines stationed on her?

That's really up to her. Not without her consent.

We continue to urge you not to mess with Gran right now.

Can I stop her from becoming a starship? Don't we, the family, have rights?

If you think you will be able to establish your grandmother's legal incompetence, you are welcome to try. However, we have highly sensitive screening procedures for our starship candidates. In 99.94% of cases that went to a competency hearing, the only outcome was that the starship was permanently estranged from their family of origin.

If it helps, your grandmother has made a very long series of choices in her life, some of which resulted in you, so she has extensive

practice at doing it. You might want to trust her judgement.

Will my grandmother be radioactive?

Absolutely! But her shielding is first-rate, so there is nothing for you to worry about there, even if you extend your visit beyond an hour or two. Also your grandmother grew up in an era when we were actually burning coal and shooting people with X-rays to diagnose their dental and medical woes, so she's far more used to being radioactive than you think. (You are also a little bit radioactive! We all are! Isn't that exciting?)

Wait, where will Gran be when she's not near Earth?

Somewhere in the Galaxy, probably! Assuming there are no malfunctions! Your grandmother will have a T3906-Delta stardrive, which means that the sky is no longer the limit for her. Many starships choose to carry exotic cargo and/or passengers within settled space for money, so the inheritance she is unlikely to ever die and leave for you could be quite substantial, and her location would be fairly predictable! On the other hand, some starships choose to explore the Galaxy on more science-focused missions or even study diplomacy. Your grandmother is not just a starship, she's a highly individual starship with her own goals and needs!

But I don't want her to be.

Too bad.

...

Is the problem that you're uncomfortable thinking of starships as having goals and needs, or grandmothers?

OK so anyway. What's in this for me?

We have been trying to instruct you that not everything in this Galaxy is about you. Some things are even about your grandmother.

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OK, you know how she always had candy in her purse? Think about that with a purse the size of a starship galley.

... How can I best support my grandmother in this excellent endeavour?

Yeah, we thought so.

But seriously, send frequent messages, visit when she's near Earth, and treat her choices with respect. You know, like you want her to do with you.

Marissa Lingen has published more than 100 short stories in venues such as *Analog*, *Lightspeed* and *Tor.com*.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Marissa Lingen reveals the inspiration behind *So your grandmother is a starship now: a quick guide for the bewildered*

Titles with a female relative in them have been really popular since the turn of the millennium, but it's mostly 'wife' or 'daughter'. Grandmothers and great-aunts don't get nearly the same kind of attention — not nubile, not conventionally beautiful, never even mistaken for pliable. Old lady relatives have formed their own characters, and yet do our stories let them have their own lives? Rarely. Very rarely.

So when my friend Elise Matthesen gave me this title as a story prompt, I was eager for a grandmother to get her own story — her own, descendant-perplexing story. We already have grandmothers who are world travellers — what about world-spanning travellers? Elderly ladies — grandmothers, great-aunts, mentors and teachers, and friends — are some of the most self-propelled people I know. What about giving them a little extra boost? Or ... booster rockets?

