Really! Womb to Tomb

Speaker: Debra Vos

The place is Des Moines, Iowa. Mondays are especially hectic for a working mom and college student Ashley Harrison. The 30-year-old mom starts her day at 5:00 am with a morning yoga workout. Then, in between catching her breath and folding mounds of laundry, she wakes up her three sons Seth age 14, Aiden age 9, and Conner age 7. At 6:30 a.m., two neighbor boys, Jerry and Joey come over to wait for the bus because their mother has gone to work. Ashley makes sure the boys are dressed as she fixes a breakfast of scrambled eggs, toast, and fresh fruit. As soon as the boys are finished eating, dishes are placed in the sink, shoes are put on, and backpacks are gathered. The five boys are now ready and waiting for the school bus. The bus arrives, Ashley gives all of the boys one by one a hug and a kiss and tells them to have a good day and to be good.

Meanwhile, in Phoenix, Arizona, 26-year-old Jessica LaFay is dropping an array of multicolored pills into her grandparents’ pill dividers. This painstaking task is something she needs to do carefully because it is critical that both her grandmother and grandfather take the correct medication in the morning and again at night. Her 75-year-old grandmother, Beverly is struggling with Dementia and her 74-year-old grandfather, Dean is recovering from a knee replacement surgery. After skipping breakfast herself, Jessica heads out the door and drives to Phoenix College, where she is working towards a degree in mass communications and journalism.

Back in Des Moines, it is now 8:30 a.m. and Ashley has already folded the clothes and packed her lunch for school. She cleans up the dishes and kitchen from breakfast, showers, and then starts her homework. Ashley is studying to become a business manager from Drake University. She also works 40 hours a week as a receptionist at Drake. Not much time remains for studying, because Ashley needs to arrive at work by 11:00 a.m.

Right around the time, Ashley walks into the office, Jessica is returning home from her morning class. She checks in with her grandparent’s caregiver asking, “How did the morning go? Or do we need anything from the store?” She chats with her grandfather about the Arizona Diamondbacks game, grabs lunch, and hits the books. Within a few hours, she is cooking dinner-chicken enchiladas, Spanish rice, and a lettuce salad. She also dispenses the evening pills to her grandparents. During supper, they discuss the news, the new healthcare reform, family business, school, or whatever happens to be on their minds. Sometimes in mid-conversation, Jessica’s grandmother stares blankly out the window, a sign that she has lost track of the conversation.

Back in Des Moines, Ashley is just about to leave work. Around 8:30 p.m., she arrives at the home of her mother, Debra, who has picked up the kids at the end of their school day and cooked dinner for them. Once home, Conner heads straight for bed, and Seth and Aiden stay up working on homework. After finishing her own homework and straightening up the living room, Ashley finally gets to bed at 11:00 p.m.
It’s nighttime in Phoenix, and Jessica is sitting on the patio not far from her grandparent’s bedroom. They have long since retired for the day. She likes to stay close by, in case they need anything. Finally, in silence of the night, Jessica climbs the stairs and crawls into bed.

Ashley Harrison and Jessica LaFay are college students with real-world responsibilities. They are pursuing challenging degrees, launching their own careers, caring for families, and trying to find their place in the world. They are both making their way through a busy, and often joyous, period of life known as young adulthood. At the same time, they are up to their necks in issues pertinent to other stages in life: childhood, adolescence, and late adulthood. Humans do not stay the same from conception to death. Development refers to the changes in our bodies, minds, and social functioning. The goal of developmental psychology is to examine these changes and attempt to understand the struggles and triumphs of everyday people at different stages of their lives. Therefore, it really IS womb to tomb. The focus is on cognitive, physical, and socioemotional development and how we change over the course of a lifetime.