

INHERITED GENES?

"WHEN I WAS ABOUT AGE 12, I discovered a small book on Mendelism. From this I inferred that an individual might not appear to have inherited traits present in the parents, but traits from grandparents not apparently transmitted to the parents. I was generally aware that I seemed different from most of my classmates, who loved sports and were generally inclined to be very noisy, shouting and laughing outside of class hours. I, on the other hand, was an observer and a listener who seldom spoke unless first spoken to, and seldom was encouraged by classmates to participate in their sports at recess. For example, often at recess two students were chosen to head two ball game teams. These students then took turns selecting their team members. Of course, there should always be exactly the same number on both teams. Then I was the only one left who had not been chosen, so I was just to stand aside and watch the conflict between the two teams. I did not feel hurt, just lonesome. I could still enjoy watching the team competitions, although they seemed more like cruel war than peacetime games.



Figure 1

Being so different from normal children, I began to fear I may have inherited the major malady of my maternal grandmother who had spent years in the insane asylum. If so, I should certainly not want to transmit those same genes to a future generation.

I decided at an early age never to marry. But I did not mention this to anyone, especially not to my mother, or years later, to those men who proposed to me. Mother, incidentally, used to say that a brilliant boy should devote his life to academic pursuits and not be distracted by getting married, whereas the greatest achievement of a woman would be to raise fine sons! It seemed as though neither of her two children would live up to her early expectations (14)."

Figure 2

Hoffleit, E. Dorrit, PhD. *Misfortunes as Blessings in Disguise*. Cambridge: AAVSO, 2002.

Activities

Reading

- Read the excerpt from Dr. Hoffleit's autobiography, *Misfortunes as Blessings in Disguise*. Why do you think she decided to tell her life story? Describe her attitude as a child about school and learning for girls.

Writing

- List three things Dr. Hoffleit said that you think are important.

Learning Resources and Information Technology

- Research: Make a list of the subjects Dr. Hoffleit had to study to become an astronomer.

Problem Solving, Reasoning and Creative Thinking

- Dr. Hoffleit became an astronomer at a time when very few women were studying math and science. Make a list of occupations you think may not yet be open to women. Describe what you would do to change that.