

# Grandparents' Visits Can Enrich The Family

by Lodie Fuller

**Sociological** history reminds us that there was an era when grandparents were nearly always present in the home and were considered to be continuing elements in the progress of the immediate family. There was no questioning where those living ancestors would spend their sunset years.

Grandma's and Grandpa's wisdom intertwined with the newer ideas of the next generation or two. Agreement was not always there, but respect prevailed and loyalty was quietly understood.

In the ensuing years, when parents and their offspring began separating quite early in the relationship, grandparents became rather abstract parts of the family—loved and revered, perhaps, but not at hand during the physical and emotional growth of their children's children.

On occasional visits, they were welcomed, but often allowed to feel like outsiders. They caught only glimpses of the patterns in the households they briefly shared. Since they had little chance to perceive and assess the standards that have been agreed upon in that setting, they were often shocked at behaviors that were unacceptable in "their day" and dismayed that their value structure seemed to be absent among those they loved the most.

Parents always, these aging couples (or singles) continue to care and be concerned. Their peace of mind depends on the health and happiness of those to whom they have given life; their frustrations arise out of their powerless position. Though seldom mentioned, they are "there for you" to all family members and their prime intent is to be available when needed, understanding full well that further reassurance of that position might be considered interfering.

Their wisdom has accumulated from myriad experiences and their attempts to share that learned knowledge is usually dismissed as meaningless chatter, or misconstrued as an effort to wedge/nudge their way into awareness. In actuality, their desire is to be acknowledged by someone in the related group as having worthwhile information. They would wish to spare the younger ones some of the anxieties resulting from poor judgments and inappropriate decisions, but each person is reluctant to receive and accept advice; they seem strangely determined to learn from the experience itself. And rightfully so—that's what growing up is all about.

When grandparents come to visit and stay a short while, it's quite easy to make them comfortable; they require just a little privacy and the assurance that they are welcome. Most always, they will pitch in and help around the house, taking on minor or even major repairs. They understand the inevitable pressures that young parents endure; they are happy if they can help relieve some of the stress.

"Baby-sitting" is a qualified privilege that they eagerly anticipate and look forward to, and the time they spend alone with the grandchildren is quite special—for all involved. There seems to be an established rapport between the elder and the younger; an unspoken, sweet conspiracy to remain friends at all costs. Together, they follow the rules and stay within the boundaries while enjoying each other's company.

Usually, the young parents do not feel threatened by such a powerful relationship, though they may sense a temporary loss of control. And temporary it is. Soon the grandparents return to their domain and the young family moves quickly back into a familiar routine. If the children seem a little spoiled or sad or distant, the phase soon passes and they are left with memories of sharing special moments with those slower moving loved ones, laughing over familiar (often worn out!) stories and feeling the warmth of affection radiating from the parents of their parent.

If, on occasion, there arises a definite conflict in beliefs, values, and/or limits, it can result in a devastating blow to an otherwise amicable partnership. There is a delicate boundary to be considered at a time of disagreement, when personalities must draw upon their inner senses to find common ground on which to affect a comfortable compromise.

Honesty is a key to opening the door to understanding. It need not be harsh; on the contrary, it can be gentle, loving, and most importantly, cleansing. The learning never ends and when all parties to a problem or misunderstanding remember to embrace the joy of family and infinite connection, they can each offer a point of view without anger or animosity; without fear of rejection. In the luckiest of encounters, humor will be the sustaining counterpart, not to make less of the serious subject matter, only to remind each player that life is really just a short game, with no losers and no winners.

Allow yourself to relax, take a deep breath, and really relax, with the realization that you are free to evaluate the degree of caring you would have in your surroundings; the degree of pleasure that you experience when there is laughter and fellowship. Bring grandparents into your inner circle whenever you feel at ease; when you can honestly be stress free about their presence in your home. Inevitably, you will be glad that you did.

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