

## STRESS-FREE LOVE

Grandchildren have a way of bringing *life* back into our lives. Mine do—all nine of them. In a world of so many lonely people, I feel blessed that my life is filled with happy, energetic progeny. All so different, yet defined by drops of my DNA. I often look at them with utter amazement—that from my genes (okay, maybe a few others) these rarefied beings sprang forth.

When our children get married, how we yearn for that first grandchild. How we look with envy (and secretly dislike) on our friends who made the *Big G* before we did. Those mean-spirited grandmothers who whip out strings of pictures as long as a football field, how they drone on and on about their MENSA-Club-intellect grandchildren, and prattle on about the little cherub's accomplishments, ad nauseam.

But, oh, when ours do come along, it's *so* different. No grandchild has *ever* been as beautiful at birth, as attentive and wide-eyed, even the birth weight and length become things to crow about. All of a sudden we're the ones sporting a backpack stuffed with pictures of the new baby in every conceivable pose known to man.

But, aside from this constant need to push pictures of our grandchild into our friends' faces, there is something else grandmothers have in common. After interviewing many women on the feelings they experienced at their grandchild's birth, the final consensus was this: we all had an overwhelming emotional pull, but also a feeling of complete stress-free contentment.

Did we feel this same emotional pull when our children were born? No! Well, if we did it was smothered under anxiety, and the fear of what to do with this baby when the nurse told us to get up so someone else could occupy the hospital bed.

I think I've come up with a reasonable answer for this stress. As young mothers giving birth, we came face to face with this small blob of protoplasm. We had no clue where to start. They might as well have put a blindfold over our eyes when they handed us this warm, stuffed blanket and wheeled us toward the hospital exit: "Goodbye. Good Luck!"

Unfortunately, babies don't come with *How-To* books. There's no user's manual with instructions on operating this howling little person. No tag dangling from a tiny pink toe with instructions on care.

Now enter the grandmother: Here is this same tiny blob of protoplasm, only now it doesn't fall on grandma's shoulders to see that this child survives, walks, talks, eats, sleeps, matures into a perfect citizen, and is socially acceptable. We leave the hospital after visiting hours, full of emotion, full of love, but absolutely free of stress.

As the baby grows from infant to toddler, we hold them close to inhale their milky-moist breath, search their faces for any resemblance of our own children, ourselves, our DNA. And it is totally *stress-free*. We get to love them, cuddle them, spoil them, and then send them home to the responsible party from whence they came.

At the end of a visit, how we hate to give up these soft, precious creations of God. We can taste their hello and goodbye kisses long after they've delivered them. How we look forward with such anticipation to seeing them again. We allow them to do things we never allowed our own children to get away with—a fact which is pointed out to us on a regular basis.

And, if this child develops traits not to our liking, well, of course we are duty-bound to tell their parents how *we* would have handled that in *our* day. But, alas, children grow. And, we are only humans—albeit *older humans*. I doubt there's a grandparent who will ever admit to this, but after a weekend of running after the precious little toddlers—tripping over their toys, watching our spotless homes fill with smudges, drips and scuffs—the inimitable words of the late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. come to mind as the taillights disappear down the street: “Free at last, free at last. . .”

Fast-forward a few years, and guess who takes credit for all the grandchildren's accomplishments? Of course—we do! Where else would that child have inherited that porcelain skin, that thick head of hair, that high I.Q.?

Fast-forward again. As we age, so do our grandchildren. Now it seems there is scarcely any time for Grandma in their lives, but we know we can catch a peek at them on a baseball diamond, soccer field, or class play, if only just to crow to the stranger sitting next to us “.....that's *my* grandchild!”

Next in this voyage to adulthood comes the dating game. Grandma Who? We might get calls every now and then asking if they can drop by to show us a new prom dress or a tux, their school pictures or report cards. Can we sew up a quickie little item for a school play or dance class?—it won't take long, Grams. Or, “. . .ah, Grams, got any extra bread?” As I head for the kitchen it dawns on me...oh, that kind of bread—then I head for my purse.

I had an eye-opener as to how my youngest grandson sees me: I attended his baseball game, and when it was over he came running up to me, oozing sweat and smiles. “Grams, did you see the great throws I made? Did you see my home runs?”

“Of course I did, honey. You were great. Are you going to keep playing baseball?”

“Heck yeah,” he answered, without hesitation. “When I'm older I'm gonna play Pro ball with the Angeles.

I was most impressed. “How wonderful,” I said. “Professional ballplayers make a lot of money, you know. You can take care of Grams in her old age.”

He thought about that for a nanosecond, looked me straight in the eye and replied, “But Grams, you’re already old and I’m only eight!”

Oh, all right, maybe I’ll have to depend on some of my older grandchildren to help me in my dotage. But, I thank God everyday that I have them to depend on—for stress-free love!