

Celebrating Grandparents

By Bev Yaworski

What do children value and need most from their grandparents? It is unconditional love and spending time together,

My husband and I recently became proud, first-time grandparents. Grandson Luke has added an amazing new and exciting dimension to our lives. He is guiding and inspiring us along a new path of discovery. With the hope of trying to be the best grandparents we can be, we thought it important to observe, experience, research, and read as we head into this new adventure. Our grandparent status is a role we plan to embrace, learn from and share.

Of course, as to be expected, the digital picture library has already increased immensely. We are also doing more watching, laughing, loving, and learning with little Luke to inspire us. Gramps and Luke love to read together, play with toy trucks, do puzzles, make crafts, dig in the sandbox, go for walks to the playground, and the activity list continues to grow. Gramps has also made a special point of having a regular Wednesday "play-date" with Luke.

The role of grandparent takes on even stronger significance in this single parent family. A family

friend, Grandma Amy and her two grandchildren—Maya and Yoko, say they love to play dress-up together when the girls try on all of granny's sparkly jewelry, fancy scarves and then later bake cookies together.

Surprisingly, I just discovered that there is a yearly National Grandparent's Day the second Sunday of September each year. This year it is on September 13. Marian McQuade, a housewife from West Virginia, decided in 1970 that there should be a special day set aside for grandparents. She worked tirelessly to make this happen until U.S. President Jimmy Carter in 1978 proclaimed the U.S. National Grandparent's Day. The statute cites the day's purpose: "... to honor grandparents, to give grandparents an opportunity to show love for their children's children, and to help children become aware of strength, information, and guidance older people can offer." They even allocated an "official flower"—the forget-me-not. The Canadian government in 1995 followed the U.S. example and designated this special day "to acknowledge the importance of grandparents to the structure of the family in the nurturing, upbringing and education of children."

Grandparenting can be one of the most rewarding experiences.

"The grandparent-grandchild relationship promotes the development of strong and healthy families by supporting intergenerational connections," says Veronica Grossi, Program Coordinator for Volunteer Grandparents. "Children who have a relationship with an older adult develop socially and emotionally in

many positive ways. This emotional bond promotes self esteem and breaks social isolation for everyone involved in the relationship."

There is even a new term to describe the modern type of grandparent that is emerging in the 20th Century—"grandboomers." This is the baby boomer generation born between 1946 and 1964 who are now entering grandparenthood. Grand-boomers tend to be younger, more active and eager to be involved with their grandchildren. One media marketing expert has even coined the term "Zoomers" to describe this lively, energetic boomer. At the same time as we zoomers and boomers zoom along, this new role can be more complex and complicated in the 20th Century than in earlier days. Some of today's challenges include: lack of time, blended families, distance issues, working parents, family break-ups, working grandparents, and newer child raising methods.

One of the outstanding guides to help parents and grandparents understand this grandboomer role is a

book called *Intentional Grandparenting: A Boomer's Guide* by Peggy Edwards and Mary Jane Sterne. The writers conducted extensive interviews and research on the topic and developed ten principles for effective grandparenting. Among the tips they offer, they stressed the importance of showing consideration and encouragement to the parents while also accepting your grandchildren for who they are—not for whom we might wish them to be. What do children value and need most from their grandparents? It is unconditional love and spending time together, report the writers of *Intentional Grandparenting*.

There are many opportunities for grandparents and grandchildren to share activities. One of the more innovative programs is called *GrandKids University* organized by Vancouver Island University. It's a two-day residence program where children and grandparents participate in hands-on learning and recreational activities. You can get more details at www.viu.ca/ccs.

Volunteer Grandparents has been created to assist families because "many children do not have contact with their natural grandparents or older family members because of increased movement, global migration and family breakdown." The group "encourages and promotes the development of strong and healthy

families by supporting intergenerational connections." They offer programs such as: the Family Match Program that matches volunteers with families who have children between the ages of 3 to 14 years old and who do not have accessible grandparents. They also organize a School Grandparent Program to provide volunteers in elementary schools throughout the Lower Mainland.

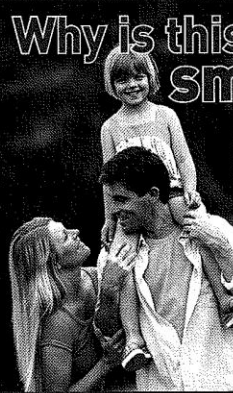
To celebrate Grandparents Day on September 13, 2009, Volunteer Grandparents has designed a special Grandparents Celebration Contest! They are inviting children to submit a photo or drawing of their grandparent(s) and a brief description of their wonderful connection. All contest entries will be placed in a draw to win a prize and have art work/photos featured on their website. Contest details are at www.volunteergrandparents.ca. Deadline date is September 8.

Family life experts say the role of grandparent could be more rewarding, and more important than ever for the stability of families and of society. It requires openness and a willingness to adapt. Fortunately, there are many resources to guide us along this exciting path of discovery. Some of these resources include www.grandboomers.com, www.grandparenting.org and www.essentialgrandparent.com

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