

A special Father's Day

Volunteer Grandpa having fun

by Karen Kersey

They're hanging from the monkeybars — upside down by their ankles. They're slipping and sliding on a vinyl banana skin flooded with water. They're hooting and hollering and splashing and laughing in a grassy play area next to a Surrey home.

They're Jim Skillin's grandchildren by choice. And he loves 'em. Standing in the soggy lawn, he beams with pleasure at the goings on.

Skillin is celebrating Father's Day today in a special way. He's a volunteer grandparent, though he tells anyone he is obviously "missing the intermediate step."

A year and a half ago, Skillin's wife of 37 years died. Their only child had died soon after birth some 31 years ago.

"I was in pretty rough shape, it left me no roots and completely at loose ends," he says.

Skillin sought the advice of a doctor who suggested he check out a Volunteer Grandparent group. That's where he found the three youngsters who are now the light of his life.

The Taylor boys, Jonathon, 5; Andrew, 7 and Joshua, 9 are children of Susan Taylor, a single parent working her way to a nursing degree at Douglas College.

Wednesdays, Grandpa Skillin drives the older boys from their own home to Prince Charles Elementary School. Then he takes Jonathon home with him for a day loaded with activities designed to please any five year old.

When his brothers arrive at grandpa's after school, the side yard of playground equipment beckons. Or on a cold and wet day, the basement loaded with books, a computer and video cassette recorder provide active little minds with nothing but excitement.

"Their favorite video is a teaching tape called phantom

them it's good for them." Skillin says with a wink. His sister Elizabeth often joins in family celebrations which include the boys.

"She helps me spoil them," Skillin says, and adds that his sister's main interest in the boys centres upon reading. She often picks up books she thinks would interest them, and helps them when they get stuck on an unfamiliar word.

Skillin says a whole new world has opened up to him. A world that includes fixing bikes, flying kites and visiting water slides. "I'll take 'em there, but I don't think I'll be going down those things," grins the former RCMP officer and retired warrant officer in the Canadian army.

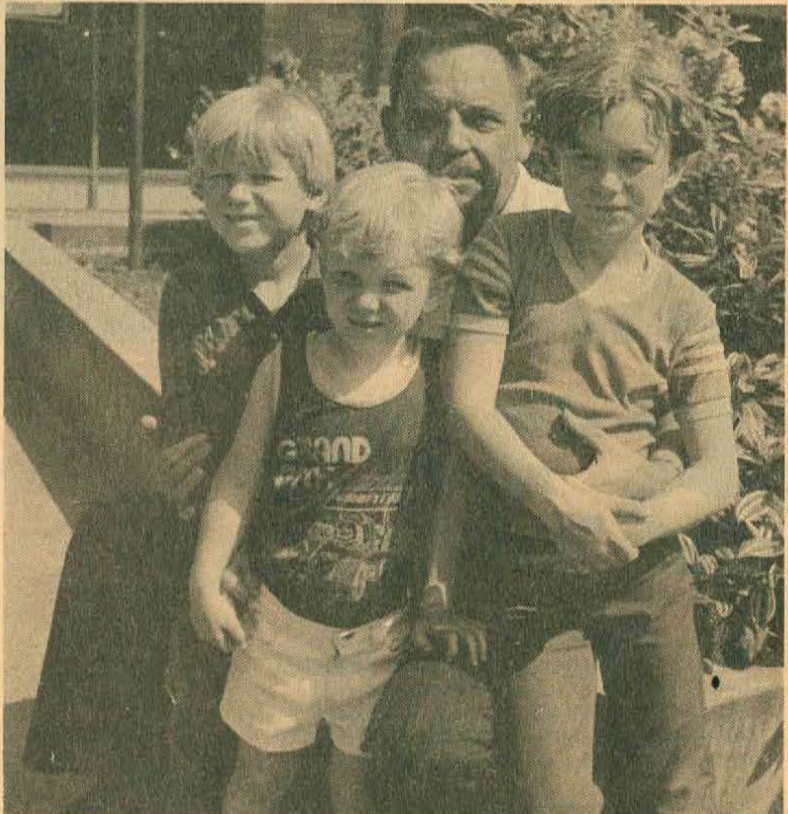
At Surrey Co-ordinating Centre, Kathy Zanatta, the pro-

gram director for the volunteer bureau, thinks Skillin is a great addition to the volunteer grandparents organization, which has been active in Surrey for the past ten years.

"There's a tremendous need for people like Jim," she says. "It's a hard program to find volunteers for — anyone who is a likely candidate often says they are busy with grandchildren of their own. Or they simply don't have the energy."

Father's Day for Jim Skillin has taken on a new dimension, since three little kids began calling him grandpa.

"Come on gummy — let's go," they say, pulling at his trouser legs. And the youthful Skillin, brushcut sprinkled with grey, heads off for the car and another day's adventure.



Andrew, Jonathon and Joshua Taylor are Jim Skillin's adopted grandchildren — and for him there couldn't be a finer Father's Day present. Skillin was lonely and despondent when his wife of 31 years died a year ago, but his life is full of meaning now, as he spends as much time as he can with the three boys. Frank Bucholtz