

'Grandma Lindy' now one of the family

THE FIRST TIME Jenny met Lindy, she held her hostage in the bedroom. "Come on, I'll show you my bedroom," said Jenny, tugging insistently on Lindy's arm.

Lindy spent the next half-hour being told by a miniature version of Rambo to stay put while she gathered toys from various parts of the house.

"I'll go get my ball, but you stay here," said Jenny, shaking her finger for emphasis.

"Okay," said Lindy.

So began the relationship between my three-year-old daughter and Lindy Arnison, or, to be more specific, "Grandma Lindy."

Jenny and I found Lindy through the Volunteer Grandparents Society of B.C., an organization I had written about a year previously.

At the time, I was impressed by the sincerity and level of commitment of the staff and of the "grandparents" I interviewed for the story.

As a single parent whose mother and father had both passed away, and whose closest sibling lived 1,000 kilometres away, I felt a keen sense of loss, not only for myself, but for Jenny, who would never realize the joy of knowing my Mom and Dad.

I wanted her to have an older, positive role model in her life to provide some kind of continuity.

Enter Lindy, who is now a part of our lives.

She is a gentle, soft-spoken woman who is quick to laugh and who, as it happens, looks a little bit like my Mom.

It is not a great stretch to see her and Jenny together and believe they are grandmother and granddaughter.

They have become fast friends and have spent the past six months going to parks, feeding the ducks and squirrels, collecting treasures on the beach, going for drives and even visiting a bunny park in Ladner.

We have done things together as a family, too, such as taking long walks in Fraser River Park, going for ice cream, and getting to know each other over the dinner table.

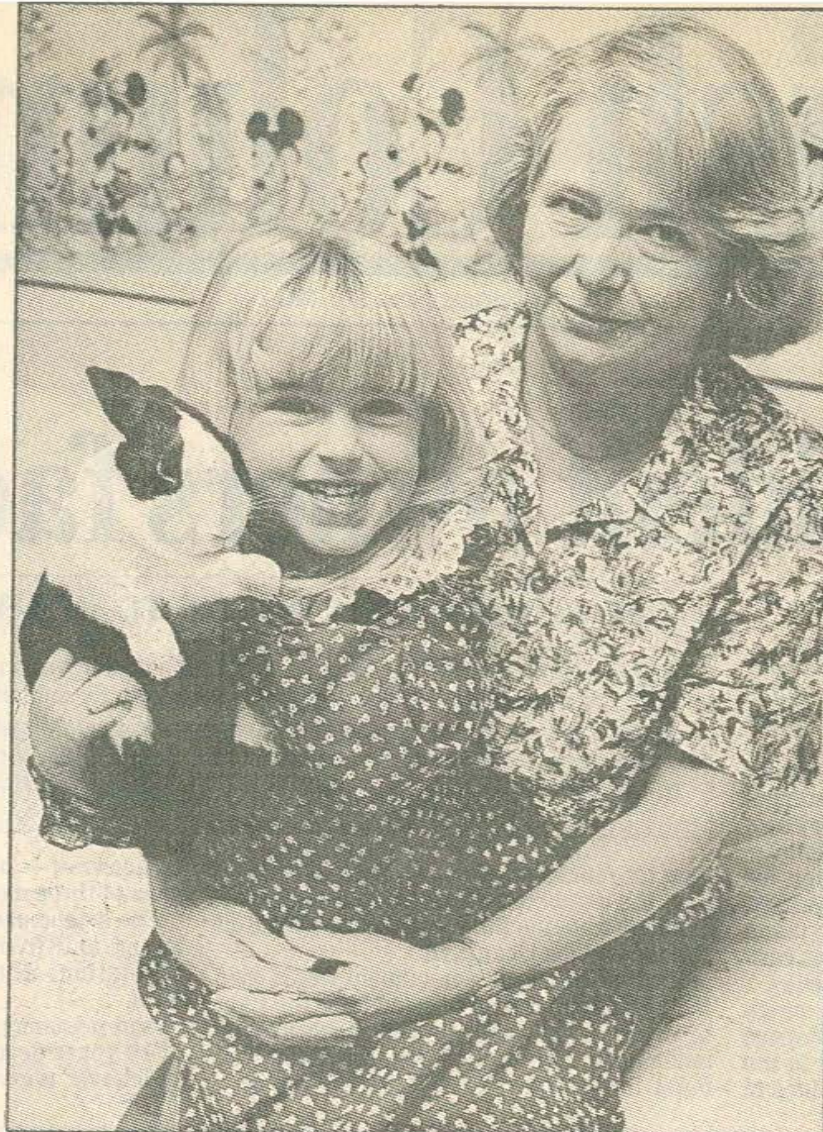
They are, to use an expression, as thick as thieves, and are often seen hunched head-to-head over a coloring book or reading books in Jenny's bedroom.

(Lindy is no longer held hostage in the room, but is allowed to come and go freely.)

Lindy says being a volunteer grandparent not only gives her pleasure, but keeps her busy, too.

"It fills a void in my life," says Lindy.

"And it helps me get out, instead of looking at the four walls in my apartment."



FAST FRIENDS, Lindy Arnison, a volunteer grandparent, and Jenny Baxter, 3, cuddle with pet rabbit, Lucy.

STEVE BOSCH

She has become an important person in Jenny's life, and is remembered on momentous occasions, like the time we returned from the pet store after buying a bunny.

"Mom, Grandma Lindy hasn't seen Lucy yet," said Jenny.

Or the time we returned from a friend's house after being talked into getting a kitten.

"Mom, Grandma Lindy hasn't seen Midnight yet," said Jenny.

Or the time just recently when we moved to a new home in Ladner.

"Mom, Grandma Lindy hasn't seen my new bedroom yet," said Jenny.

Lindy has since seen the new bedroom, met the kitten (which we no longer have) and gotten to know

the bunny; probably a lot better than she had hoped.

During her last visit, Lucy um, er, peed on her.

"She's done that to us, too," I said, apologizing profusely.

"Someone I know who has a bunny says that means she's claiming you — that she really likes you," I added, lamely.

"Really?" she said, looking at the ever-widening stain on her slacks.

I don't think she bought it, but she laughed, anyway.

Jenny and I like Lindy, too, and are grateful to be a part of her life.

And I think she likes us, so it's kind of like a mutual admiration society.

And as much as Lucy's vote seems to make it a unanimous decision, I think we'll keep her in the cage next time Lindy comes to visit.

Volunteer Grandparents in a non-profit organization founded 19 years ago to bring together people of grandparenting age with families who do not have grandparents living nearby.

Anyone 40 years or age, married or single, can be a volunteer grandparent.

The only other requirement is that applicants be willing to share their experiences with a child and to become part of an extended family.

The time commitment is to be mutually agreed upon; there is no contract involved.

Volunteer families are either one or two parent families and have children between the ages of three and 12.

If you want further information please contact the Volunteer Grandparents Society of B.C. at 3-1734 West Broadway, Vancouver, B.C., V6J 1Y1, or call 736-8271.