



SIMONE PONNE/News Staff

George and Doris Martin delight in looking at the pictures of their volunteer grandchildren.

'Believer' applauds grandparent program

By Sandy Macdougall
Staff Reporter

George Martin believes good grandparents are the best friends any child can have. That's just one of the reasons Martin's been a member of the Volunteer Grandparents Society of B.C. for 20 years.

The value of volunteer grandparents was never more clear to Martin than when he received a letter this spring from the mother of his first volunteer grandchildren.

Some passages from that letter:
"When I was 17, my dad died.

When my boys were seven and three, their dad died. On Nov. 26, 1974, we got you and we've had a dad ever since."

"Gramps, you have given me and the boys all the love and understanding and care any person could ever wish for."

"Through the teenage years and rebel times, you stood by the boys and were always there for them.

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Gramps, you have given me and the boys all the love and understanding and care any person could ever wish for.

- Volunteer grandchild's mother

Grandparents building bonds that last forever

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"You helped them beyond anyone's expectation and you're always there now.

"And, you have us Gramma. We didn't have one of those, either.

"It is always lamented that the words, thank you, cannot express enough meaning but with all my heart and soul, I thank you for being our Gramps."

The Volunteer Grandparents Society of B.C. brings together families who do not have grandparents in the area with people of grandparenting age. The society began in 1973 and Martin's been around almost since the beginning.

The retired social worker said his professional background brought him into regular contact with children who needed the wisdom and discipline a loving and caring grandparent could provide.

Like the old adage about finding a busy man to do a job you want done quickly and properly, Martin and his wife, Doris, between them have 35 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren. Both in their second marriages, they have also been volunteer grandparents for nine other kids.

"We don't need any pats on the back. We've had a lot of enjoyment doing this," George and Doris said.

They maintain regular contact with all their "adopted" grandchildren but there has never been a Martin family gathering.

"We can't afford one," George said with a smile.

George and Doris were both born and raised in Vancouver. They moved to Pitt Meadows two and a half years ago.

Oddly, when George was first introduced to the idea of volunteer grandparenting, he thought it was a great idea but not for him. After 20 years and nine volunteer grandchildren, he's changed his mind.

There's little doubt that a grandparent can have an enormous impact on young people. It's less obvious but equally true that young people can have a positive and lasting influence on their volunteer grandparents.

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— George Martin
Volunteer Grandparent

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Martin admits that he spent much of his life being unexpressive. He enjoyed the company of people but remained quiet and expressionless in the company of children.

That all changed one day when his first volunteer grandchild said, "What did I do wrong? Are you mad at me?"

To become an effective volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship, Martin said ground rules have to be established so the parent, the child, and the grandparent can understand what is expected of everyone.

"Grandparenting is a natural thing and fills human and natural instincts in all of us. It's just plain and simple love and understanding of everyone's need to belong," Martin said.

There is an abundance of literature that explains volunteer grandparenting but Martin summed it up by saying, "Both parents and volunteer grandparents must be in agreement and work everything out between each other; not to please anyone else, but because this is what each other wants. Trust, love and honesty works."

His professional background in social work and lengthy experience as a volunteer grandparent have led Martin to believe the program can be successfully expanded into

many areas.

He would like to see volunteer grandparents active in every hospital and community. He said the costs would be "peanuts" compared to the benefits that could be derived from the program.

"The government has an obligation to foster children and children in need," Martin said. "When does any child need support and understanding from people like grandparents more than while in hospital?"

Himself a veteran, Martin suggested service organizations like the Royal Canadian Legion could easily fund community extensions of the volunteer grandparent program.

For more information on the
Volunteer Grandparents Society of B.C.,
contact Hinda Simkin at 736-8271