

## On Grandparenthood....

In 1973, I started the most important job of my life, motherhood. A bit different from the norm, I adopted my children from Bogotá, Columbia. Motherhood changed by life completely. It gave me a purpose and a new meaning to my life. Having both sets of grandparents there to cherish and observe my children's earliest growing years was truly a gift. When my mother passed away when my oldest was only five, it made me realize how incredibly important grandparents are in the lives of their grandchildren.

Through the years of working at HERJC, I have come to know many grandparents who live near their grandchildren and are actively involved with their growth and development. Most of the children fortunate enough to have grandparents have lives enriched by stories told of their family history, virtues, traditions and recipes often used at holiday times. They learn the language that occurs in families, as well as the personal stories, jokes, trials and tribulations. It has been said that children who have known their grandparents grow up to love older people instead of regarding them as scary or irrelevant.

The grandparents who come to school to pick up their grandchildren often share with me the intimate details of their loving relationship with their grandchildren. Their tales are reflective of unconditional love, indulgence, generosity and concern. Grandparents no longer have to be concerned with discipline and rules, instilling moral values or building character. They become their best selves.

"Grandparenthood" writes Therese Benedek, a psychoanalyst, is "parenthood one step removed. Relieved from the immediate stresses, grandparents appear to enjoy grandchildren more than they enjoyed their own children." You just have to see the smiles on the faces of the children who get greeted at the door at the end of the school day by their grandparents to know how special grandparents are in the lives of the children.

When most grandparents migrated to warmer climates after they retired, my husband's parents made it clear to me that they would stay in New York with us so they could see our children as often as possible. I will never forget the countless days they came to baby sit the girls while I went to work. Although my father did finally move to Florida, his frequent visits to New York allowed my girls the opportunity of having him in their lives quite often. He made sure that his grandchildren would visit often, and the daily phone calls he made kept him

connected with our family routines. All the grandparents loved our children unconditionally. Our children were brilliant, gifted, talented, beautiful and, naturally, smarter than any other children they knew. They could do no wrong in their eyes. There were holiday meals, graduations, birthday celebrations, Bat Mitzvahs, Sunday trips to local restaurants, picnics, weekend sleep-overs, dance recitals, Hebrew School events and so much more.

When my father-in-law died over a year ago, I listened with amazement as my daughters, now 21 and 18, spoke about the memories they had of him. The smallest details were remembered with love and thoughtfulness; The grapefruit he cut for them each time they came to visit, their trips to the zoo together, the card games they always played together, the TV they watched together, and all their special dinners, had such meaning for them. They spoke about his unconditional love, his pride in their creativity and how his eyes would light up on Rosh Hashana as we walked into *his* temple, and he showed off *his* grandchildren to *his* friends.

Those of you who have young children are finding out that it is a long and challenging road to raise healthy children. It is a job, far too difficult for parents to do alone. Children need time, attention, conversation, love, support and limits. They need to feel safe in a world that can often be frightening, threatening and overwhelming. Children who are fortunate enough to have the involvement of grandparents in their lives are truly blessed. It has been a blessing to have my parents and in-laws take such an active part in my children's lives. My children have been forever changed by the richness of that relationship, and having them along in my parenting journey too, has enriched my life.

To all the grandparents out there that I have been so lucky to meet at HERJC, thank you. Thank you for your wisdom, your guidance, your love, and your ability to champion your grandchildren and make them feel so very special. Thank you, too, for being such an integral part of your own child's journey into parenthood. You are all appreciated by a director who values the gifts that you give unconditionally to the children at the Hewlett-East Rockaway Jewish Centre Nursery School.