



# Grand Mothering

I'm about to become a GM. A Grand Mother. Nicknamed Tiny, he has been growing nicely for 37 weeks and soon we'll get to meet face-to-face, rather than via the bulging elbows and knees that keep my daughter awake and my son-in-law entranced.

It's the next family adventure, a lifelong one that will change us all.

I've been intrigued to hear the conscious conversations that the New Parents are having. How will we parent our son? Are we raising a boy or a man? What will he mirror of the best and worst of us? What matters most for him to learn? What will he teach us? What kind of person do we hope he will become?

When, after months of disappointment, the New Parents announced their pregnancy, I was overjoyed for them. Yet, surprisingly, it set me back on my heels, reminding me of my own ageing and inevitable mortality. All the stereotypes of Grandmother flashed before my eyes. From a small, stooped woman, shawl around her shoulders, bearing a basket of homemade goodies and sitting quietly in the rocking chair in the corner, to the overbearing and dogmatic matriarch, holding court and dispensing unsolicited advice.

Neither rang true for me, so it was time for some conscious grand-parenting conversations. After all, this new identity goes far beyond whether I'm to be called Nana or Grandma. So, with Tiny's Mum and Dad, we've started exploring how they see the role of grandparents and the wider family circle.

I've been wondering what kind of grandmother I want to be? How can I be useful and supportive to his parents? How will being a grandmother change the way that I am a mother? And more personally, what does the role signal for me about my own life?

The thing is, becoming a Grandparent is another visible sign of ageing. One that has nothing to do with wrinkles and everything to do with legacy, and the prospect has me considering what matters most in my life and what I wish for him.

I want to foster his curiosity and sense of adventure. So, what level of energy and fitness do I need, to examine bugs in the garden, push swings at the park and march in gumboots in the rain? What do I need to do about my health if I want to be around to celebrate this young man's 21st birthday?

My love for words has seen beloved books that were saved from earlier years, brought out and re-read. Remembering couch snuggles and bedtime stories, the pages of Little Yellow Digger and The Very Hungry Caterpillar are dog-eared and worn. It's definitely time for a visit to the Children's Bookshop to replace old titles and find new joys. How do I encourage him to fall in love with learning and the world of books? Not necessarily so he can race into academia, but to instil a lifelong passion for interpreting the world.

In this technology driven world, the simple pleasure of creating something from nothing has become a hobby, rather than a necessity. Yet the thinking involved in taking simple materials and baking or making, encourages experimentation and being comfortable with failure. Lessons for life. How can I make the space for him to make a mess and clear it up. And repeat.

And finally, I have learned that life is all about relationships. That love and connection protect us and build resilience. Recently I watched Robert Waldinger's TED talk about the Harvard Study of Adult Development. His conclusion from 75 years of tracking the lives of adult men is that the good life is built with good relationships. So how do I build a strong intergenerational bond with this young man, whose world will be so different to mine? I want to see the world through his eyes and have him understand what brought me here.

You might think that such learnings are the responsibility of his parents. Yes, and they are mine too. It takes more than parenting to raise a child and I have every intention of being as present, active and involved as his parents wish me to be.

Friends, who are grandparents, speak with delight, saying 'If I'd known how good it would be, I'd have skipped the middle bit and gone straight to grandparenting!' From a place of uncertainty about the ageing implications of being a grandparent, I feel a new sense of opportunity, of possibility and of hope. When Mother's Day comes along in May, I will be celebrating the Grand extension to Mother. \*

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