

## **THEY CALL ME GRANKIE.**

**This is a social paper based upon the life experiences of the writer up to and including the date of this paper.**

**The title is one of convenience and any other title that relates could well be considered.**

This paper has received no significant editorial work, as it is considered that it lends itself well to some humorous artwork to break up the word content and to make the subject more acceptable to readers'.

It covers the period from 1994 to the present time.

The young man, the subject of part two on disability, has become a fine young man playing Rugby as a number 3 tight side forward. Now sits in the number 4 seat in a first 8 boat at rowing, has demonstrated skills in art, mechanical expertise, is an exceedingly competent driver and unusually for today reads and writes fluently and competently. He has high-level skills demonstrated in the day-to-day use of technology and stands a sporting chance of entering university; although his personal choice is to become an electrician.

The writer has a continued connection weekly with him and with youth through the Boys Brigade and some church organisations. The comparison of this boy with two others of the same age and disability, known to the writer, shows the powerful advantages to be gained from having grandparents prepared to take up the slack, that would normally appear during the early years. Stability and association with constant family oversight will lay the foundation for personal confidence and preparedness for school and other social life aspects.

John Young 20<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

This paper has been the work of,

**John Young -a grandparent.**

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## Chapter One.

There would not be a parent anywhere who would not be overjoyed at the prospect of being a grandparent. The prospective grandmother will have some reticence about the process.

When our first grandchild was on the way, the feelings of joy at this extension to the family took several weeks to penetrate our daily lives. To bring some order out of our chaotic and utopian thoughts over the baby, we found it necessary to go back to basics and address those questions we could not avoid. The how, why, when, where, what and with whom is this child to be cared, if the need arose.

As the parents signaled they would both be returning to work, our son immediately, daughter in law, after the first three months of the birth? The question of where would the little person be placed, became the first major decision to be addressed.

As grandparents we discussed this problem between us before coming up with, what we believed was a workable and viable option. Being the only grandparents immediately available, we offered to care for the child during working hours each day Monday to Friday. We communicated this offer early in the pregnancy; allowing for us to be a part of the establishment period prior to the birth.

Being experienced parents did not prepare us for our son and daughter in law's personal views on child rearing. From the outset, parenting in 1993 was going to be different from our style. If we were to play a part in the child's upbringing then our first obstacle would be the parents.

This is not a statement about them personally or their potential as parents, but about the simple fact of life – they will be the primary care givers and we the secondary.

The complexities associated with a basic and uncomplicated decision, did not rear their heads for quite some time later, after the birth. This paper is designed to share a few of the questions that need to be addressed, as carers in this same position.

As the secondary carer, your first order of business is to become emotionally attuned to your own expectations. As a male reared on the family brood, well used to handling most aspects of a babies needs, the prospect was not too daunting. For my wife the decision was more basic and the chances of her setting aside a lifetime of experience at the coalface of child rearing, was not very likely.

Mothers have a tendency to ask a gross amount of questions, with the view to becoming articulate on the subject at hand. Mere male tends to do the job, in the hope that it will not reoccur. Raising babies' guarantees several things will happen:

- That many activities are monotonously regular.
- That 'Vicks', under the nose, does not always help.
- That feeding a child does not necessarily make it stop crying.
- That a child with a 'poohie' nappy will not be satisfied until changed.

- That the mother, who has gone shopping will not be back at the agreed time i.e. before the child awakes and needs changing.
- That the new parents will exhibit the same occasional lack of self-control, as did you and your parents.
- That the new parents will have as many crazy ideas about child rearing as did you and your parents.
- That trying to avoid chastising little Willie or Matilda is the same as avoiding the common cold – impossible. The Dr. Spock formula is not recommended.
- That the expected will become the unexpected. (Or vice versa)

We were fortunate; our offer was accepted. At this point the learning curve was almost vertical.

- ‘Oldies’ classes to show us the latest methods in little kids care.
- New nappy folding techniques (but no new way to change them) until disposables became available.
- New ways to bath baby. (Dunking is not an approved method).
- How to soap babies and not have him/her exiting your grasp and becoming sub-orbital or at the least impaled in the ceiling.
- You’re told babies have a degree of resilience when dropped. (They are not like cats; they do not fall right way up when mislaid on the way to the drying table).
- You are introduced to the basics of modern birthing processes (I was under the impression that the 60’s and 70’s had exhausted all the options including having them vertically.)
- Milk formula’s now come by the gross including ‘au *naturelle*’.
- Putting the baby to bed – on the side, on the back or on the stomach
- Bedding – mattresses – Rubber, foam, down, innerspring (to counter cot death syndrome)

### **At last!**

Came the day, and after a mighty and lengthy struggle the little fellow popped out. When we first clapped eyes on him, I was personally struck by the thought that if one could predict the outcome of a relationship – even in part – the spirit and spontaneity would never eventuate. It was at this point, quite separate from his grandmother, that the principle of an unrestrained and unconditional relationship opportunity first raised its head.

I made a personal decision that my relationship with this little fellow would reflect those activities and attentions that seemed lacking in my personal experiences. There is no great psychological equation, simply an opportunity to allow this new relationship to establish its own parameters. Those parameters will be the distance I am prepared to go before drawing a line.

This is opposed to the normal concept of parameters, where the boundaries (personal or house rules) are stated in advance and are subsequently challenged and modified.

- As grandparents we have the chance of realising new experiences based upon the freedom of NOT being a parent.
- Certainly never say 'NO' at the beginning of a conversation unless danger threatens.
- Always to talk and explain everything no matter how many questions keep coming.
- Not to shout or abuse in public or private.
- Never forget to give heaps of hugs and kisses each day.
- To encourage no matter how poorly the child performs.

The place and time for displaying love is not important – only the spontaneity.

One's style of relating to children will at some point be found wanting. There is an instinct in adults, particularly men, that one should never give quarter to an opponent, even a two-year-old. One tends to stand and to try and hold the advantage. I personally found the whole process tiring and brutal on the lower back. I resolved to spend more time on my knees and after a period, learnt the art of moving around quite quickly without damaging myself.

When Lachlan was seven, he said, 'Granky, I like playing with you'.

'Why is that, I asked'?

'Because you are the right height, was the prompt reply'.

One thing became obvious at an early stage; it was that Granky and Maa were staring at a benchmark for successive years that would leave little time for personal activities.

### **Caring - the how - the time.**

One would hope with love, a caring attitude, teachability, foresight, and perseverance, a balanced and appropriate discipline. Not the least - what is it the parents expect from you the carers?

### **What are the hours?**

The answer to this question may appear to be easy. The hours may be related directly to the hours worked (if both parents are working) or are they?

- **Let's say** 8.00am. To 5.30pm. = 9.30 hours
- **What about travelling time?** Say 7.30 am. To 6.00pm. = 10.30 hours
- **What about overtime?** Say 7.30 am. To 7.00pm = 11.30 hours
- **What about office parties,** conferences, meetings, transport strikes and seminars on the weekends? Let us average one hour per week annually = 52 hours
- **Our original week will be.** - 46.50 hour week.
- **Our travelling week will be** - 51.50 hour week.
- **Our overtime week will be** - 56.50 hour week.
- **Our sundries week will be** - 61.50 hour week.

If any of these events appears twice in one week then the Carers' share could be as high as 70.0 hours and all this for love of the child (we hope).

### **Prams, Strollers and other things**

One has several choices here in relation to where the 'child mover' comes from. There are specialist shops and shops that have a range of perambulating or wheeled conveyances as a customer convenience.

**DO NOT GO LOOKING TO PURCHASE A STROLLER UNTIL YOU HAVE DECIDED WHAT IT IS YOU INTEND IT FOR.**

If someone offers to supply the pram or walker ask whether you could have some input. If not, you may regret their generosity.

### **Specialist shops:**

Will cater for all types and tastes from the old fashioned 'Swan' prams to the ultra lightweight strollers. All you have to do is look at your budget and use some common sense. If someone offers to buy the pram/stroller ask if your input would be possible.

Are you?

- **The athletic type** – marathons and similar events
- **The walking type** – social events and charity affairs

- **shopperholic** - pushing on carpet with some strollers is an hour of aerobic exercise.
- **A baby walker** - walking to the swings, railways to see the trains, or just meandering.
- **A casual user** - put it in the car and take it out of the car.
- **A parading person** - Socially concerned with status and being related to the 'Jones.'

### **Things to look for;**

#### **Does the item comply with Australian Standard AS/NZS 2088 (as amended)?**

- Do the handles reverse or are they fixed?
- Will the pram or pram style stroller fold easily. Ours required an enormous amount of agility to fold - do you have to push with one foot, balance with the other, squeeze a lever with one hand, push down or pull up with the other hand and finally balance the baby on your head, simultaneously. An experienced salesperson can make this operation so simple that you will be unable to refuse, for fear of being seen as an imbecile.
- Many strollers do not allow you to reverse the handles. Subsequently you are obliged to push baby facing the sun. Why the sun, I hear you ask? Because our roads generally run east to west.
- Check the materials used for the seat. If it is obviously of cheap material, weigh the value of a few more dollars and get the heavier and hopefully more durable seat.
- If the seat is not padded or supported underneath - most 'cheapies' will not carry a bag of potatoes home, let alone a hefty child of twelve months to two years of age.
- Make use of a lambs-wool seat cover. Go to a motorcar spare parts department and take your pick. One for the driver of your car and one for the pram. These car seat covers are not adequate for your new baby to sleep on. They are for sitting only.
- Seat length is a problem for heavier children. If the seat comes only half way down to the knee, then put self in the child's place and imagine what effect the pressure will have on little thighs.
- Getting onto trains and up steps with a loaded stroller can be quite hair-raising. Light they are and very flexible when suspended between two willing carriers.
- Some strollers will not allow for the stroller/pram to be tilted backwards easily. The child's weight is not at the point of balance and it is necessary to apply considerable pressure in order to counter the weight of the child and lift the wheels into a train or up steps.

- Backing up places all the weight on your arms, as you have to lift upwards first before moving backwards. **Do not rely on volunteers!** Murphy ensures that they will be scarce.

### **Disputes.**

Why is it necessary to decide between what appears on the surface to be two fairly simple questions? The following are some of the common points of dispute between parents and the potential Carer:

- Is there a dispute over times available for the care period?
- Is there a dispute over who will collect the child each day?
- Is someone upset because the grandparents consider that it is the parent's job to raise the children not to 'farm' them out to care?
- Is there a cultural clash over the rearing of the children? A young man on ABC television in late 2000, when asked what an Australian would look like by the middle of 2050, replied '... they will all look like me – mixed blood = mixed cultures. This is evident even at the time of writing.
- Is there a clash between the grandparents, one who is opposed to the child becoming a 'cash cow', i.e. accepting payment for services rendered?
- **Remember!**

**When a Carer receives a payment equal to or close to a professional Carer's wages, then the power and authority that is carried in love, of the child and family, will be viewed as a commercial investment. This leads to some really skullduggerous behaviour supported by jealousy and politics within the extended family. Even an hour given in helping to resolve a situation will carry thoughts of remuneration. Believe it or not!**

- Beware the rationalising relative!
- The reverse side of the coercing coin is the parent who appeals to one or other of the grandparents to help with the child caring duties, because family should look after family. Culturally this will be true for many countries in the world.
- Cross culturally this will provide a catalyst or flash point for disagreement, when one pair of grandparents have a natural interest in caring for family and the others believe in letting the parents raise their own children.
- Really, if you are opposed to raising your child's children then why oppose the other half who is prepared to carry out those duties without complaint?

Everyone wants a little bit of power and the prospect of someone else hogging the limelight and 'stealing' your share of the child's love is a powerful force for negativity and intrigue.

## **MONEY?**

**Whatever arrangement is made must be adhered to.**

### **Coming and going?**

Let us move to a scenario in which the caring function will take place at the grandparent's house. Two matters need to be considered.

- What fixtures and equipment need to be left at the premises?
- What fixtures and equipment need to be carried back and forth each day?

### **Pre and post arrangements:**

- The parents should arrive at least fifteen minutes before they need to begin travelling to work. This will ensure an adequate time to transfer equipment and special items, such as milk and medicines.
- This period needs to be used for any special instructions in 'modern' childcare, that the parents deem necessary. Any appointments, feeding instructions or other matters likely to affect the child or the time the Carers may have to themselves.
- End of day arrangements should allow time for small anecdotal happenings likely to be of interest to the parents – first words walking, potty activity or kindergarten hours later on.

### **What items are to remain with the carer for care in their home?**

The following is a guide only.

- Folding cot (approved type)
- Mattress (type will be personal choice. Look for mattress' that are allergy free and carry some recommendation by an approved health body. If the baby has some form of allergy seek professional advice do not 'wing it' in the decision department.

- Assorted bed linen and baby clothing (agree as to who will be responsible for the washing of these items).
- Farex or other approved first solid, some home or purchased purees.
- Bottle wash, brush, bowl or bath for bathing and nappy bucket with Nappysan or equivalent.
- **Nappies** – Flannelette, cotton or disposable. Disposable wipes and or Chux wipes as inserts for cotton/flannelette nappies. **Read the labels on the wipes for the moisture agent used.**

**Stroller/Pram:** You must look carefully at all types whether you can afford the top or bottom end of the market. Some items to consider;

- Does your house have lots of steps?
- Is your house built on a suburban mountaintop? Steep driveways a goat will avoid?
- Do you have a long natural earth or unpaved driveway leading to Shangri la?
- Do you own a dog(s) that like ‘walkies’ all day and have failed obedience school?
- Is your only means of transport the bus/ taxi services? Bus services nowadays do not like waiting for people with strollers. Very few buses make for their provision. Some taxi drivers may drag themselves out of their seats to help, particularly if they are being watched.

### **Going back to work?**

When you first learn the good news, going back to work is not an option for discussion. Common sense dictates that at least one parent will return to work immediately; generally this is the father, but modern households now have many fathers who are the house parents and the mother, after a suitable period, may return to work early, as the breadwinner. For this text we assume that necessity deems that both will return to work; father and then mother after three months maternity leave.

### **Breastfeeding**

Our daughter-in-law considered breastfeeding essential and she persevered through some difficult moments. She made provision by purchasing the appropriate pump and other utensils. She arranged through work to use one of their rooms to express a supply for the following day.

There appears to be no half measures about breast-feeding; either it is a joy or absolute murder. What ever is your situation, explain and if able, provide breast milk for as long as the baby will accept it or you are able to provide it.

### **Numbers two and three arrive?**

If the parents are responsible and sensible, additional children will arrive comfortably spaced apart. Apart from any thing else these additional children will all have personalities of their own and their own desires to be a part of the family. The eldest is privileged in most circumstances. Parental selfishness in foisting their inappropriate family planning arrangements on long--suffering grandparents is not uncommon.

If the first child is being cared for in the grandparents house then numbers two and three may present a space dilemma (not enough bedrooms, unit too small, and not enough storage space).

### **What alternatives are available?**

- Care for the children at the parent's home.
- Build an extension at the parent's house.
- Build in under the parents house
- Upgrade the garage and connect to the house with covered way
- If the garage is not being used and is part of the house design then convert it to whatever is needed.

Quite obviously several of these solutions will be expensive. However grandmother may not wish to move from her house for the caring period each day. Generally grandmothers are more attached to their homes than maybe the grandfather. Dangling Foxtel or Optus as a bonus for caring in the parent's home is not necessarily an attraction.

### **Late nights and after hours?**

A child will generally look for its parent's about four thirty in the afternoon unless a special treat is in progress (train or ferry rides, special visitors). This period is marked by irritability, grizzling or whining about nothing, demands to play at anything along as it involves you.

Telling the child that mum and dad will not be home at the normal time, will promote a series of questions, about why or when is that? A regular routine each day not only breaks the day into manageable chunks, it helps the child with their understanding of time.

The solution we found was to soften the edges of the day before extending into the evening. Softening can be done by gently breaking the day into portions that are either slightly longer or shorter than normal.

This tends to distract the child from their normal routine. One can even vary lunchtime and provide a visit and play time at Don Dons (McDonalds) or The Hungry Raptor (Hungry Jacks) as a special treat.

Full stomachs and some visual activity can defuse a potentially disruptive moment. Fixed bedtimes say 7.30pm for under eights and 8.30 pm for older school age children seems to work well.

### **Grandparent Carers?**

The majority of Grandparents would answer NO. There are a number of European, Asian and Oriental cultures that would consider it their right to be involved. However the bulk would seek to support rather than to have a 'hands on' approach.

The writer, with fourteen years of full time day care, five days per week, no leave loading, holidays or overtime, respectfully suggests that there is a profound difference in outcomes, between assuming a caring role and that of a long distance don't call on me unless it's absolutely necessary position.

Children do not discriminate between grandparents. They do discriminate over attitudes. A child knows when a person is trying to relate, rather than associate.

Finally grandparents considering this carer role would do well to recognise that thrusting themselves into this situation needs very good health. This applies to the caring of boys and the physical nature of boy's play. Good health will allow you to enjoy and benefit from this new relationship.

### **What will be the reaction of the other grandparents?**

If the extended family is to be harmonious then any sense of deprivation felt by all challengers for the job must be addressed. **Remember you are not carving up the Sunday roast.**

The parents must set out a clear statement of what it is they would like to see happen. You may be surprised to learn that they do not want their children raised by the family, even if there is no history of dysfunction.

They may consider that having, from the twelfth week, a whole mess of strangers looking after the child may be less alienating than having the child stripped from them in a loving relationship offered by the family member.

What grandparents would want to alienate the child's affections? Probably not too many; but there will be one in every hundred who disapproves of their daughter-in-law or son-in-law's parenting skills.

**What is the Grandparents' situation; are they willing and able to assume the role of Carer?**

Barring distance – what is their attitude?

Are they opposed to some one looking after the child(ren) because they are glued to the old concept of 'well you had them, you look after them'? This mindset suggests a lingering bitterness over the caring of children question.

Bitterness is a dreadful legacy; every sharp cynical barb spoken in the presence of the child(ren) sticks like a flies to sticky paper. Such comments eventually come 'out of the mouths of babes and suckling's' much to the consternation of all and sundry.

**Will the bulk of the caring be borne by the non-working partner in the grandparent equation?**

If the couple are Grandparents and still comfortably in the fifties, then one partner may still be working. The strong likely hood is that the grandmother will have to raise the child (ren) for the first few years. This presents a problem if both are boys. They need access to very active games bordering on the robust.

It is not suggested that such games are mutually exclusive to boys. Many girls now chose to enjoy games, such as soccer and rugby in an equal opportunity manner, at least to an agreed age, before these games become a same sex opportunity.

**What can Grandparents bring to the caring of the child?**

I have stated previously that parents cannot love their children unconditionally. In bringing a child into the world there are responsibilities incumbent upon the parents for the care and admonition of the child (ren) as they grow.

Those responsibilities are to provide a loving, attentive caring and secure atmosphere in the home, to support discipline of a loving and non-aggressive type; to cloth, feed, educate and to encourage personal growth.

The freelance approach of the fifties, sixties and seventies; trying anything just for the hell of it, are not only mindless self-indulgent propositions, but to all intent and purpose is practical lunacy in this day and age.

### **Then what can Grandparents bring to this equation?**

The opportunities for new thoughts and practices loom large for those prepared to relax their established parenting patterns. It will be nearly impossible for a caring, sensitive and responsible Grandmother to throw away a lifetime of child rearing experience, for a new philosophy; that seeks to extend ones' personal boundaries in a new relationship.

For a Grandmother particularly, discipline is likely to be paramount in the relationship. Good order and discipline will make life easier to accommodate.

Grandfathers are generally and naturally an extension of their past. They do have an advantage in this new area of caring for family members. They are generally not burdened by many actual experiences of substantial child rearing and should therefore apply a broad brush to this new canvas.

For a Grandfather to commit to being responsible for another person's child (ren) will require a shift to a new paradigm. He must become an island of calm in a sea of dysfunction. He must be an experimenter in the development of **his** personality and **his** skills at relationship building. These new people in his life will look to him for the opportunity to belong in his world.

- Story telling, active playing and going beyond a life's experience; to experience a new life that is so rewarding as to be almost impossible to express.
- To be walking along and have small hands seek yours for comfort and security.
- To have a small finger trace your facial outline whilst you pretend to be asleep.
- To have a small face look pleadingly upward asking whether you will be going on holiday with the family to see the other Grandparents.
- To be privileged to answer, possibly, seventy questions a day and to satisfy the enquirer.

Above all of these things is the wonderful knowledge that you have changed emotionally and spiritually in this new relationship. Words of caution to the grandfathers - do not push so far ahead in the relationship building exercise, that you disenfranchise your wife/ partner in this enterprise.

Finally contrary to populist thinking there are differences between boys and girls, philosophically, emotionally, intellectually and in spiritual interpretation. No amount of idealistic 'hoo haa' about the equality of the sexes will make the slightest

difference to these facts. All are entitled to an equal opportunity and viva la difference.

### **The meetings of worlds**

The child (ren) will all too soon find out that the world is not as rosy as some will make it out to be. It is therefore a responsibility of the grandparents to be appropriate when recalling past glories and anecdotal remembrances. A child will instinctively know what it is that appeals to them, what makes them laugh, what makes them nervous, what makes them demand more of one thing and reject another with equal enthusiasm.

Grandparents have a chance to end all the old bad habits and start again. Learn to relax, be a little uninhibited, try spontaneity as an option. Grandparents have the opportunity to right some of the wrongs and accept the child (ren) without preconceived conditions. **Remember!** You only know half of this child's personality. The other half is an exciting journey with many beautiful surprises.

- Give it time to mature
- Do not launch a tirade on house rules
- Move stuff instead of leaving it within reach
- Never say no! As your first word – unless danger is at hand – then explain why
- Explain things and decisions – talk to the kid
- Do not admonish for petty accidents – try Whoops! Or count to five before speaking. Better still ask the little warrior to help you fix the problem.
- Ask them what they could have done to avoid the accident
- Get on your knees Granddad and eyeball the kid

One must remember also that what a child's mind receives and digests through a ten hour day, will be regurgitated at home in only a fraction of time. Inappropriate/dysfunctional life styles will ultimately bring discord onto all those involved and that includes language; which is generally the first casualty.

Grandparents and parents should refrain from making comments about family members within earshot of the children. A child knows who they can trust-. It may not be you.

For the Grandparents this should be a love job. Money cannot buy a developing meaningful relationship with a precious little human, which relies on you for ten to twelve hours per day. The child (ren) need to learn that both families are different but the same. When they do realise this, their response may surprise you greatly.

### Emotional strings

Many Grandparents will attest to the fact that they are unwilling participants to the child-minding proposition. What then could be a scenario likely to make a Grandparent to feel **not obliged** to help raise a child (ren)?

- They still have a child (ren) at home
- They are both on a disability pension
- They have complicated health issues
- One of the grandparents is opposed full stop
- They are remotely located and do not drive
- Public transport is poor to non existent
- One or both do not care for their child's choice of partner
- They hold the view that any relationship outside of marriage is promiscuous and ungodly. Caring for the child is therefore tantamount to acceptance of the situation
- They are opposed to a relationship with a person not of their religious, politics, colour, culture or ethnicity.
- The child may be marrying or living with a person who has been convicted of a crime of violence, drunkenness, drugs or is associated with a person(s) who are described as 'undesirable'
- One partner may be a declared homosexual / lesbian and the child is wanted to make the family 'complete'
- The Grandparents assistance is sought, despite the fact one of the parents could well afford to remain at home and care for the child (ren)
- The caring process will interfere with the Grandparents social life

There are probably another thousand reasons why Grandparents would not want to be involved in child rearing.

- Why then do so many Grandparents find themselves **obliged to** care for a child they may love, but is a burden in their lives?
- Fear of losing a family relationship.
- Fear of being overwhelmed with guilt at rejecting the opportunity.
- Fear of being rejected by the child later in life.
- A court appoints them guardians due to parental inadequacy/ inability
- They are bulldozed with promises of support, by less interested family members.

- They take on the role to deny the other Grandparents whom they consider unsuitable types
- Their house is not a child (ren)'s house and they will reluctantly make it suitable

### **What of costs?**

#### Motor Vehicle:

Assuming the Grandparents have a car, the question of running costs will rear its head. Whilst the child is a baby little costs are incurred and the Grandparents may elect to carry that expense.

The only immediate issue would be the matter of comprehensive insurance. If already in place, okay. If not then the parents may chose to assume that expense and place the vehicle on their policy with the grandparent's use of 90% and the parent's use of 10%.

Ultimately the Grandparent's vehicle will find itself on the road for up to four hours per day ferrying kids from one place to the next. The cost for running the vehicle will increase significantly and serious thought must be given to covering it.

### **The child and dysfunction.**

As a grandparent you expect and believe that all your grandchildren will be perfect. The reality is that cruel circumstance injects its venom when least expected. Disability no matter how mild will be a challenge requiring unprecedented amounts of your love, firmness, a capacity to instruct appropriately and patience. Such was our experience and the child's developing language will be the subject of another manuscript in part two.

### **Being well and connected**

At the risk of being or seeming to be repetitive; the question of health and general well- being will raise their heads ad infinitum or ad nauseum, depending on your interpretation of your current circumstances.

Historically, feeling good about ones self is greatly improved, if social opportunities exist, is encouraged, accessible and welcomed. To think of these elements in terms of identifiable activities is beyond this manuscript.

The caring role for grandparents will sometimes be one, which in, isolation seems to be a natural element to the equation of family support.

This naturally occurring factor is not made any easier by the popular thinking of the day that says, *'you wanted the job and that is your problem, get a life.'*

Several questions you can ask yourself, might include the following,

- How do you really feel at this moment about your family members and those around you?
- What are your expectations for yourself and others?
- What elements of your life do you feel happy with?
- What elements of your life cause you some concern?

These are questions for self-examination.

Many people define themselves through the understanding of their relationship role within the family. If you do not handle well this activity, of self-examination, it can lead to self-deceit or delusion about your actual position.

Being on the defensive is as catastrophic as being aggressive about your position within the family.

If you feel that there is insufficient recognition or kindness, then your understanding of connectivity must come from a two way street. Relationships involving the carer role need to be nurtured and treasured. A natural limitation will be the product of your expectations and the possible lack of parental sensitivity.

When my turn came to be the sole Carer it was obvious that I could remain daily, cooped up in the house or I could get out and about and do some meeting and greeting or find an interest to fill the free time. I began to write. A simple decision but with a child in a stroller or two mobile boys some care needed to be exercised or I would become a victim of my own enthusiasm.

This brings me to the question of support. It is easy for a grandparent Carer if alone to feel alienated from society. This sense of alienation unfortunately will be reflected in your grandchild's recall to his/her parents and the total context will of course not be explained. You will have the subject matter raised without prior warning or request for an explanation.

## **Conclusions.**

If any conclusions can be drawn from this text it would be,

**Firstly**, for the Grandfathers relax guys and be the person you would like to be and not the person you have been told to be. Be a happy go lucky fool, the kids will love the madness and spontaneity.

**Secondly**, grandparent Carers should keep their council. Your lectures, innuendo and hints about caring will destroy the very thing you are attempting. That is not to

suggest that acts of violence and serious abuse should go unrecognised and unattended to.

**Thirdly**, lay your ground rules and stick to them, particularly where children are concerned. They need to respect you, not fear you.

**Fourthly**, it is inevitable that you will be taken for granted at some time. This in our experience has not been a deliberate issue but was evident at times. But many of my acquaintances feel they are being used and not considered properly. How this could be rectified is difficult to suggest.

**Finally**, it is not an unreasonable observation that the relationships between older members and the modern family, here in Australia, have changed dramatically in the last half-century. This change from interdependence to independence has been directly related to increases in our standard of living, mobility, modern communications, technological innovation, a Federal social service designed to encourage independence and a more powerful force- the rise in mixed ethnic relationships.

Previously the relationship between Grandparents and Grandchildren was one of an essential cultural interdependence reflecting centuries of the need for families to support themselves, without State dependence.

There is strong evidence that suggests by the second generation, the culture of relying upon older members of the family for the care and nurturing of the young, has been replaced by a fierce independence that demonstrates the new parents desire to be their own masters. The fostering of independence spells doom to the cohesive nature of old cultural practices; subsequently the development of 'care by strangers' is deemed more beneficial to a child's social and intellectual development, than the natural love and protection accorded the child in a family atmosphere. Pity really!

There is still time in Australia to stop this slavish servitude to the advancement of technology and the constant need to be acclaimed and recognised, despite its advantages; before our great grandchildren will be punching a card in the belly of 'Robo the Clock on Clown' at your local child depository. This may have already happened in your area.

It is my belief that through Grandfathers there could be significant changes in the caring of grandchildren. Many men have allowed themselves, for the sake of 'peace' to be relegated to an after thought. The men I know would be super carers if given the opportunity.

To close I return to some previous comments, as carers from birth of this new life we have to all intent and purpose lived in a microcosm of social existence controlled by the needs of a small totally dependant being. When kindergarten and pre-school

is a feature of life, we find ourselves well and truly outside the social community to this point in time.

Do not get caught in the web of indifference to your personal circumstances, in the belief that when schooling finishes at the end of the day, month, year and or appointed time you can then regain your lifestyle pre baby. The world has moved on and so should you.

For grandfathers there will be a mighty battle to overcome the prejudices associated with any scenario that involves children and men. This applies particularly to schools in the public system that are governed by the social elite of our public services; who believe that the mere mention of males as Carers in the same breath as children is an obscenity. Our local State school has cancelled Fathers Day because there are so few requests for the purchases of Fathers day gifts on the stalls provided. Having spent six months as a Liaison Officer at that school, I can testify to the closed shop nature of the schools administration, with the emphasis upon female administration from the Parents and citizens association downwards.

Men in positions of trust and care or likely to have such interaction are not encouraged, despite some lip service to that position. I felt a definite frost in the air. It was interesting to note that a female took over the position, in name, but not practice.

Finally and I have been at a loss to know where in this manuscript a section and commentary on the recognition, responsibility (if any) and the support for voluntary grandparent carers should be inserted.

We are here now! At a government level and any changes will have to come from that source, the recognition of an individual as a Carer is based upon the principle of the word **PRIMARY**.

Primary means the person or persons who have overall care 24/7 until the child or children are eighteen years of age.

Any government support for primary carers is means tested. And therefore a couple with two incomes receive nothing in carer assistance. Those that do receive assistance generally have little cash to spread around.

A primary Carer can be the natural parent (s), or a court awarded Carer. This narrow interpretation has the effect of exorcising long term voluntary Carers; whose role and place in the academic and political scheme of things, in Australian society, has been overlooked or found wanting by some newly created academic with the life experience of a boiled sweet.

Compounding the problem is the employment by governments of individuals who have a university degree that is 'relevant' to the tasks to be done. Someone should read the fine print on these degrees because it would seem that there is an increase in the number of people with 'doubles' in dysfunction.

Let us look briefly at the scenarios surrounding a voluntary Carer and determine exactly the nature of their contribution to the nation and its future.

1. Fiscal – grandparent Carers allow both parents to contribute to workforce.
2. Both parents will have a tax gain for the government.
3. With both parents working, those over a certain level of income are disallowed child support other than the basic child endowment.
4. The parents are spared the need to find and meet costly childcare provisions, thereby leaving places for those without Carer support.
5. Grandparents who are both active and proactive in their caring will have a very stabilising effect upon the children, who will feel secure and less likely to vandalise property or roam the streets seeking mischief and unpalatable relationships.
6. Parents who are semi professional or in a professional employment will be more likely to send their children to private schools. There again more places for those who find themselves financially constrained and needing to use the public school system.
7. In theory, better educational opportunities should lead to better employment opportunities for the children and a less stressful home life for those in this position.
8. In our present economic climate we are urged one and all to embrace the American way of life. God help us all if we do. Therein lies the perfect example of greed, selfishness, racism, massive political skulduggery, disenfranchisement of vast blocks of immigrant peoples, the mass segregation of huge numbers of people, who possess nothing in the way of government support, are destitute, angry, violent, disillusioned, disrespected and forced into criminal activity in order to eat.
9. This anarchic dream, in which democracy has been interpreted into their legal system, by politically correct elements in their public service, sees the criminal as the victim and the victim is seen as the aggressor by their courts, and it is rapidly descending upon us.
10. If you discourage grandparents from providing support for their families or assume, for political gain, that two incomes are better than one and therefore the parents should bear the support of their Carers, in the community's interest; an incumbent government would not be holding the moral high ground.

11. However the community is not encouraged to support grandparent Carers; except when the need arises to burden them with responsibly, they had not sought, because of an accident or dysfunction within the family.

## **PART TWO.**

### **INTRODUCTION.**

There would be few families in Australia, and in other parts of the world, who are not or have been touched by the plight of one or more of their children suffering some form of disability.

Disability is long past its older simpler traditional association with physical incapacity only.

Children are being struck down with such ferocity by allergies, inherited issues and careless parental oversight; that what was in my childhood – the thirties, forties and fifties – where a knowledge of or actual relationship with a person with a disability, was in fact as rare as hens teeth.

Most children in that period, of the thirties, forties and fifties, unless quite obviously suffering a physical/ mental disability, were classed as a bit 'slow', 'backward' or an 'imbecile'. My own sister was in fact classed as 'backward'. She did however possess a determination to break out of the mould in which she had been cast. After a full life of being a Carer of children and a teacher of English in the Middle East she spoke fluent Arabic, Italian and obviously English, married an Italian embassy first secretary and retired to Italy and now cares for her granddaughter.

Whether we admit it or not, disability in any one of our acquaintances or friend's family's produces in us a mixture of revulsion and pity and the thought that *'but for the grace of God, there go I'*. This may seem an overly simplistic observation but it is a natural response by someone, who has not experienced an extended association with a disability of any kind.

There is also a world of difference between knowing a person who is disabled, living with a person with a disability, having a passing or casual acquaintance, working or social, with a person who has a disability.

With disabilities being so varied in intensity, one would be remiss in assuming that all disabilities are the same. They do in fact have elements in common but the degree, to which each disability traumatizes not only the recipient and their Carers', is the same for all levels of the community the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

What separates the several levels of the community is the ability to gain financial, educational, medical and social support.

The following article, which was placed in a local Primary School newsletter, is offered unabridged.

#### **“NOT AS SIMPLE AS Attention Deficit – Explaining Autism Spectrum Disorder.**

**Dr. Leo Kanner, an American psychiatrist, first named autism in 1943. Autism is a development disorder, and the exact cause is still unknown today. It seriously affects how children learn, communicate and relate to others.**

**The term autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder is a very broad one, covering a whole spectrum of developmental characteristics and abilities.**

**You may hear other terms such as: Kanner’s syndrome, early infantile autism, early childhood autism, classic autism, atypical autism, mild autism, high functioning autism, Asperger’s syndrome and PDD-NOS (pervasive Development Disorder – not otherwise specified).**

**A child who displays behaviours’ typical of autism may be described as having autistic tendencies, autistic traits or autistic type behaviours’. This child may not have autism. Autistic type behaviours’ can be associated with other disabilities – sensory impairments; Fragile X Syndrome, Rett Syndrome, Angelman Syndrome, Landau Kleffner Syndrome, Prader-Willi Syndrome, Williams Syndrome etc.**

**The term ‘autism’ embraces a huge range of behaviours, development characteristics and abilities – it does not tell you much about an individual child. When a child with a diagnosis of autism comes into your care, it is very important to get to know that child.**

**Find out all you can about them – speak to the parents, read any medical or therapist’s reports, observe and befriend this child. Don’t just assume they will be or act a certain way because previous experience or prior knowledge about other children with the same diagnosis. (Adapted from an article in ‘dsaq digest’ Winter 2008, the newsletter of the Downs Syndrome Association of Qld). Submitted by Jo Bekkers (program Coordinator)”**

For many years there have been reports of and mixed evidences associated with Attention Deficit Disorder, Many teachers are plagued with children who are simply ill disciplined, disruptive, disorganized, alienated from normal social functions and behaviour codes; are foul mouthed, bullying and just plain disgusting. Teachers are expected to rectify a parent’s lack of interest in discipline, conduct and or instruction of their child or children.

We are not suggesting that there are no children who suffer from some sort of behavioural disorder – rather that as the article above infers, imputes and implies, there are many and varied reasons why a child may be the way they are. We need to be careful and considerate of the child’s position and that means seeing the appropriate authority. Herein lies the rub; getting to this informed source is in itself a mighty mountain to climb and for many beyond them either financially or by circumstances.

This text is a personal walk through the minefield of disability and is not an academic work. The disability in question is a level of autism coupled with an Asperger’s syndrome element in a family member. This combination produces a specific set of disabilities that are,

- A very high level of ‘I’ or self-indulgence at the expense of others.
- A remorseless and disempowering language attached to endless questions about all subjects, whether relevant to the current conversation or not.
- Violent responses when feeling frustrated or threatened.
- Inability to correct the pitch of the voice.
- Inability to remember in the short term or to focus for any reasonable period.
- A singular lack of co-ordination when playing sport.
- Making use of inappropriate language as a means of dominating or introducing self into a group activity.
- Making use of confidential information to embarrass or threaten to embarrass for personal gain.
- Completely unable to demonstrate, relate, become attached to or love family members in the traditional manner.
- Will demand purchases without regard to circumstances within the family.
- A mind like a steel trap when it is self-serving.

- Unable to grasp the basic requirements of team sport. The 'I' factor is ever present. Will pick up bat and ball and walk away if unable to be permanently in a favourite position.
- Despite these problems there are many endearing moments, but rat cunning is never far away.
- An inability to read other people's faces and temperaments coupled with a fearless approach to resolutions.
- In all probability will possess their own style of communication and language.
- A very intense 'now' syndrome.
- An insistent desire to keep you apprised of their every move and activity.
- Develop an intense sense of frustration leading to outbursts of abuse at friend and foe alike.
- Inability to transition –Insecurity, focus fails, panic sets in and a refusal to continue quite common.
- Persistent "butting" to established conversations.

## **WHY?**

If I or any other person could answer this question in such a manner as to be able to resolve positively, our understanding of these great hurts, it would be miraculous. The truth is that we cannot answer most of the questions raised by these disabilities and we are therefore left to look around at our families, our lifestyles, our associations and our life's choices for clues or even guidance for to the truth.

The first person to be blamed either openly or overtly is the mother. Most people believe that many illnesses are carried by the mother and passed to the child. More particularly any illness will go to the first or second boy born to the family.

Whether there is evidence to support such claims it does seem profoundly obscene to be pointing the finger, before there is an adequate understanding of the situation.

The mother will be challenged on her lifestyle pre birth; using alcohol, not taking Folate, smoking, eating overly processed foods, not getting enough exercise and on it will go endlessly. Distasteful as this activity is, there is one point which is beneficial, and that is that from the discussions, questions and hopefully resolutions some truth or understanding may come out in the future.

For my family any truth about a disability did not make itself evident until the child was going close to being two years of age.

This means that for the intervening period, we as a group had been living with and asking questions, which reflected our confusion concerning the responses we were seeing.

Like all families we understood that there would be milestones in this child's development and watching for these physical, emotional, and mental stages and making allowance for differences in responses, and some delays in natural development, we became concerned. The child's motor responses were becoming very concerning.

Through this stage the family was into the world of the pediatrician.

The first results from a series of motor response and intellectual tests indicated that some form of autism could be causing the problems. For parents this is a crushing evaluation.

Quite obviously these issues were not going away and as I had the daytime care of this child, I too, was obliged to watch, note, learn and carry out activities that the parents had been advised to do. These activities would very quickly either resolve some issues or highlight other issues. This was intended to be a confirmatory exercise.

It was at this point, quite separate from the parents, that after taking the child to the university for a further assessment of motor functions, that I took exception to a particular piece of advice offered by a young aspiring pediatric student.

This person was obviously acting upon a predetermined set of instructions. In my humble opinion this instruction, on the matter of correction, was in fact a precursor to some emotional and intellectual issues that would suppress the child's responses and subsequently their ability or desire to respond.

Anything that causes the parents to jointly debate, research and act upon information that is available from many sources, can only help them to structure their lives to cope with the problems that now confront them.

The source of this particular disability, despite intense testing and investigation has never had a known source. In a nano second something happened and we now have to get on with whatever is required to see this child is prepared for independence, when schooling is over.

The following is a small selection of thoughts expressed by many very kind parents who shared their feelings privately over the last ten years. Each is a person who cares for a family member with some minor or serious disability.

- 'What the hell can you do but press on – a grandfather.'
- There were eight responses that indicated that, one parent, usually the father who was unable to cope with the problems presenting and had elected to leave home.

- Seven grandparents became the de facto parents without support from the government or the community at least during the daytime. As previously stated elsewhere in this document unless you fit the tight requirement for the primary Carer role, then society will disown you. A primary Carer by definition is either the parents or court appointed Carer.
- I do not know of one grandfather who has been given the care legally of a child or children from the family. It is generally the Grandmother who is considered capable and responsible.
- This is a sorry indictment of parental associations over the years; when the wife and mother isolates the father in order to enhance her own position within the family's hierarchy.
- With some good fortune the numbers of men assuming responsibilities for children is improving and hopefully their influence will continue through to their vigorous geriatric years.

### **Arkie Granky! Arkie!**

At two and a half it was abundantly clear that the child was experiencing considerable difficulty in making himself understood.

#### **Language**

THE FOLLOWING IS CHILD SPEAK OR WHAT DO YOU THINK I HAVE BEEN SAYING FOR THE LAST TEN MINUTES.

There is a peculiar but logical sense of where it is that they should be in any conversation. The following were this child's general speak terms and use of the primary and secondary place of, me/I to explain their involvement.

**Primary** – 'meier' is used to denote a personal activity in conjunction with the first subject mentioned.

E.g. Daddier, Meeier(pronounced mee-er) boof – means Daddy and me played golf.

**Secondary**- Daddier boof Meeier – Daddy played golf and I went too.

#### **Common words;**

- **Daddier** – Daddy
- **Mummier** – Mummy
- **Meeier** - Me or I
- **Lockie** - Lachlan also known as ‘both’ ( brother)
- **Grankyr** – Granky (grandad)
- **Nar or Mar** – Nana ( grandma)
- **Na-na** – banana
- **Puss** – pussy cat
- **Puppier** – puppy ( this covers all four legged animals, if the name is unknown)
- **Uck** – Truck usually a large one not related to the building trade.
- **Arkie** – any vehicle Digger, bobcat, shovel, roller, cranes or articulated vehicle carrying any of the aforementioned or building materials.
- **Laylar** – a trailer
- **Ower** – mower motorised ( Ower laylar ) mower either has trailer attached or provision for trailer ie. A towball / bar or is mounted on a trailer.
- **Ipper** – whipper snipper also called **weeeeee-**
- **Yep** – yes
- **Nope** – no
- **Wee waa, wee waa** , wee waa noise made by ambulance, police and fire engines
- **Beeep beeep beeep beeep** noise made by arkies as they reverse.
- **Meeier** (by itself) repeated incessantly – I’m talking to you moron I want to go too, or give it to me cluck-head, I had it first, or I want to play too.
- **Ucks** – ducks only used when near water or near building sites where wild ducks are prolific.
- **Boof** – Golf
- **Ools** – tools
- **Arden** – garden
- **Ar or Rar-rar**- car
- **Lees** – car keys – these are associated with holding Granky’s interest; child senses he will get some attention if they are ‘lost’.
- **Eat** (with finger to mouth) – food please or you are not having all of that I hope?
- **Eep or leep** – sleep with hand to side of face

- **Poohier** – pooh in wrong place or I need to go.
- **Wee weier** – wet nappy or where is the toilet please?
- **Poohier** -with no pooh means I have peed myself dozens of times and it (nappy or pants) won't stay up any more.
- **Footboyer** – Football, playing fields and Daddy as rugby trainer.
- **Boofboyer** - Golf balls
- **Go** - Go
- **More** - More
- **Owier** - an open wound or scratch, large red spot or a hurt accidental or otherwise.
- **Ooier or Oochier** - A wound that has healed and left a scar or a remembrance of an Owier. It also refers to any item a knife, scissors, fire of any kind, machine guns and hand grenades with the pin pulled; that could hurt you.
- **Yuckier** - That is disgusting, don't like that, it stinks, it hurts or milk is no good for me, I'm lactose intolerant. Yuckier is also used to tell you that a truck/bus is belching noxious fumes, oops! The house is on fire etc. etc.
- **Row-re** - Landrover, any four wheel drive, utility or like vehicle generally associated with building sites.
  - **Weel** – Motorcycle, cycle or a part of a toy with wheels
  - **Scray** – refers to graffiti only or any approved artworks on the exterior of buildings.
  - **Dishing and airodishing** – Air-conditioning
  - **Umagella or ungarrella** – Umbrella
  - **Wimmun** – Wynnum suburb in Brisbane

Most of the child's spoken language has to be interpreted in the light of what it is he has in his hands, is standing on, is looking at, and is associating an idea with.

**Example:** driving along – passenger screams – arkie Granky arkie –

Response (for time) Where?-

Kid points –

Oh a building site; can you see an arkie? –

Nope –

Is that a house being built?-

Yep!

Has an arkie done work here do you think?

Yep.

Have you seen them there? Yep/nope.

**Example:** Granky! Meeier ools, -

Your tools Peter?

Yep.- Mummier ools!

Mummy bought them for you?-

Yep.

**Popular hand signals are;**

- Fingers of hand pinched to signal little amount
- Thumb wagging for end-finished- don't give me the giant finger job, don't want to play or videos finished.
- Finger to mouth = wants food
- Exclamation Meeier! With pointing or sweeping motion = look at what I did – I made that – I want to go out there.

If the child is holding something and saying Meeier look for an activity close by, even if he may not appear to be looking at it.

**Q.** Peter which of these is yours?

**R.** Meeier ! Will pick up or point if he remembers where it is.

Child has tendency to drop things and then be confused by the profusion of unconnected objects. If there are several objects close together, take out life insurance before removing them.

The last two weeks he has started to place the correct letter in front of many words but when a second word is added tends to forget the first word or part thereof.

This is at aged three years. Vocabulary at three and half, significantly better and now using phrases/sentences that are clearly decipherable.

Exiting grade four with little or no difference between himself and his peers in terms of reading, numbers and personal conduct. However short term memory is still and will always be a challenge.

I still maintain, and believe that historically, constantly correcting a child who has a developing language is seriously flawed.

This was the instruction I was given and to me such a practice would do little for the child's self esteem and subsequently their desire to participate in the learning process.

I chose to listen to his language, speak his language and when he was not expecting correction, I would speak the correct word or pronunciation. By the time he entered grade four his self-developed language was all but gone, supplanted by the correct terminology, phraseology and or pronunciation.

Point made!