

**“GRANDPARENTING THE STEPFAMILY WAY”**

**By Gordon A. Taylor**

The traditional job of a grandparent is to enjoy the fruits of their parenting years, i.e. grandchildren. To periodically and temporarily enjoy visits with the children, spoil them if possible and then send them home to mom and dad.

My, has that definition changed! Between divorce, drugs, desertion, death, teen pregnancy, remarriage and a host of other reasons, it has turned the job of grandparenting into at least a rescue project and worst case, a nightmare.

The 2000 census placed the number of children being parented by grandparents at between 4 and 5 million nationwide. There are at least 2.5 million grandparent headed households. So as you can see from the statistics many times the “grand” has been taken out of grandparenting.

I believe grandparenting or grandparents as parents (G.A.P.) has definitely impacted society. Relative to that, today’s grandparents are threatened with everything from not seeing their biological grandchildren after divorce, grandparenting step-grandchildren, to having total legal guardianship and life-long parenting responsibilities. In any “normal” stepfamily with children I may be faced with the decision of whether or not to raise children that are not mine biologically. And, sometime in the future I may be faced with that same decision applied to grandchildren that are or are not mine biologically. I WAS!

I write this as I sit in an elementary school gym watching my step granddaughter at her volleyball practice, while thinking, “What am I doing here?” I’m twice the age of most of the parents, and have already raised three sons who are out on their own, with families. I have already been through the Little League/Soccer syndrome. Yet I chose to do this. It does tempt me to believe in senile dementia or at least a senior moment.

When we made the choice to take legal guardianship and raise my wife’s granddaughter she was a two-foot high cute toddler, so no sweat, right? Wrong! If you feed and take care of them, they stick around and grow up, which she did and continues to do. That is the point.

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Seriously, the decision was thoughtfully, prayerfully, and rightfully made in order to save two lives. The subsequent effects were what I didn't and actually couldn't have known. It changed my entire lifestyle. No one my age had a toddler or really wanted to entertain one in the midst of an adult evening. Diapers were no problem. With today's Pampers, any man afraid to tackle a young rear end is really a whimp. Also, now I wasn't providing babysitting, I was looking for babysitting resources in order to do anything social or business outside the home. Financially it was a shock as well. I had forgotten how fast they go through clothes, especially shoes. Thanks to Michael Jordan sneakers now cost \$100 or better. All in all I call her my retirement child, because that's where it's going - money as well as energy.

On the positive side since none of us know what life is going to throw our way we have choices to make. I believe in being a learner, a learner of life, as well as of stepfamilies and grandparenting. Sometimes if we don't look at life events as "what can I learn from this?" the event doesn't make much sense.

God has taught me a lot in my venture as a step-grandfather/dad". My teacher has been a beautiful talented and strong-willed 13 year-old young lady. The stepfamily can be, above all else, a place to learn. I have learned better parenting skills, better communication skills, and what it is like to raise a girl, after three brothers and three sons.

I thank God for her, even in the midst of my frustration. I also continue to pray daily for strength and guidance as we head into the teen years at a time and age that I had the fantasy of retiring. My ultimate goal is to see her "well married" and to break this insidious cycle of divorce and remarriage.