

Grandchildren as Caregivers

By Judith S. Parnes, L.C.S.W., C.M.C.

Labor day has come and gone, the days are getting shorter; the kids are back in school. Something else has also past. Were you one of the many people that let Sunday September 9, Grandparent's Day, come and go with hardly any notice? If so you are probably not alone.

Marian McQuade of Fayette County, West Virginia, is credit with the idea to link children to the wisdom and heritage of their grandparents. President Jimmy Carter, proclaimed a National Grandparents Day in 1978. The day is celebrated every year on the first Sunday after Labor Day.

Now, recent research shows that grandparents as well as grandchildren may benefit by sharing time together. According to a study at the University of Haifa in Israel, grandchildren who were taken care of by their grandparents during their childhood expressed a far greater desire to take care of their grandparents as they aged. Even little things like occasional babysitting for a few hours were enough to make grandchildren want to return the favor to their grandparents. One can imagine how much stronger that bond grows as you look at recent Census figures that report 28% of preschoolers are regularly cared for by their grandparents during the hours their parents work.

The University of Haifa study also revealed that not only did grandchildren who were taken care of by their grandparents express a desire to help, but that they actually were very involved in day-to-day caregiving tasks, such as transportation, shopping, nursing care and emotional support.

The practical meaning of the research is that grown grandchildren can, and often are out of both love and necessity, involved in helping their grandparents and they too can be included in your elder life planning. As author Lois Wyse has said, "Grandchildren are the dots that connect the lines from generation to generation."

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