

On Sunday, September 10, our nation celebrates National Grandparents Day. The impetus for a National Grandparents Day originated with Marian McQuade, a housewife in Fayette County, West Virginia. Her primary motivation was to champion the cause of lonely elderly in nursing homes. She also hoped to persuade grandchildren to tap the wisdom and heritage their grandparents could provide. President Jimmy Carter, in 1978, proclaimed that National Grandparents Day would be celebrated every year on the first Sunday after Labor Day. I'd like to add my own thoughts about the special gifts children receive from elders who care about them. This month's official occasion conveniently encourages me to add a message that applies every day of the year.

Celebrating Grandparents

Once upon a time, almost every young child was lucky enough to spend a few minutes, hours or days sitting in a lap, listening to a story or walking in the park. Chances are good that the person who owned the lap or told the story or walked hand-in-hand with the child was Grandma or Grandpa. Used to be that most children grew up with at least one grandparent living in the house or neighborhood. These family pillars gave us what we needed to hear and feel. They had the time to be patient with us, the distance to love us without conditions, the experience to guide us, the wisdom to teach us and the importance to buffer us from the judgment of our parents. Grandparents inspired the earliest gifts of laughter, connectedness, loyalty, hope, nostalgia and faith. Their lives connected us to our storied past and our wondrous future. Together with our parents, they were often the first champions of our greatness and value to the world. They were also all too often the first loved ones to die and to help us discover that love endures, even continues to grow beyond life itself.

Today, families must work harder to maintain relationships with grandparents who may live far away or far removed from the nest they helped build. Young and old alike have less time to themselves and, ironically, spend more time by themselves than in previous generations. Most of us rush through life faster than ever, sharing ideas and emotions at the speed of light without seeing the face or hearing the sound of another's acceptance, pleasure, sympathy, concern or doubt. Digital communication is replacing personal dialogue. If we are to reverse the American epidemic of stress-induced disease and disability, we must restore the centrality of relationship in our lives. The capacity to care, to form relationships and to create community starts with family and friends. Do yourself and your children the deepest favor – keep them in close touch with their grandparents and grand friends. Children who are loved or mentored by an older person are more likely to grow healthy, succeed in school and achieve in life. Every child deserves to live happily ever after.

Sincerest best wishes,

Peter A. Gorski, M.D., M.P.A.