

**Reflection for “Focus on Grandparents and Grandchildren”**  
by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 27 September 2020

[MW20-36]

Maya was sitting on her Grandfather's lap as he read her a bedtime story. From time to time, she would take her eyes off the book and reach up to touch his wrinkled cheek. She was alternately stroking her own cheek, then his again.

Finally she spoke up, 'Grandad, did God make you?'

'Yes, darling,' he answered, 'God made me a long time ago.'

'Oh,' Maya paused, 'Grandad, did God make me too?'

'Yes, indeed, poppet,' he said, 'God made you just a little while ago.'

Feeling their respective faces again, Maya observed, 'God's getting better at it, isn't he?'

There's a special relationship between grandparents and grandchildren

- from what I have observed over the years  
it is both a blessing and a gift from God

The other morning as I was sitting at my desk, making some notes

- a significant coincidence struck me:  
I was writing Grandparents' Sunday in shorthand  
using the initials “GPS”
- GPS = Grand Parent Sunday  
but GPS also stands for Global Positioning System
- who here has a smart phone and Google maps?  
GPS is what Google uses to tell you where you are  
point out your position on the map

And I thought, Grandparents can do the same

- in the family and indeed in the wider community  
Grandparents have a wealth of wisdom and experience that can ...
- provide direction  
point the way  
help when people are lost or confused

In all the travel that we did last year

- we would have been totally lost without Google maps  
it used GPS to tell us where we were  
and lead us to where we needed to go
- it was just so helpful

Grandparents have an amazing calling

- to be the GPS for their grandchildren  
to help those younger ones following along the way  
to stay on the path of life  
to point them in the direction they need to go

GPS – Grand Parent Services: what a blessing to be able to share

Moving along somewhat, here are some thoughts from one of my favourite writers, pastor of a Quaker Community Church in small town America

I've been thinking of Grandpa more than usual because a woman recently approached me after a speech to tell me her father, a man named Charles Gardner, and my grandfather had been friends. I remembered that her father and my grandfather had ridden bicycles together. My grandfather's crowning achievement was pedaling 75 miles on his 10-speed bike the day he turned 75. He mentioned it whenever someone brought up the subject of cycling. What he never mentioned is that my grandmother rode alongside him the entire way on her three-speed bicycle.

Grandpa was a disciple of routine. He began each day of his retirement sweeping the sidewalk and gutter in front of his house on 5th Street in Vincennes. He ended each day sitting in his rocker watching Walter Cronkite, except on Saturdays, when he watched Lawrence Welk. Every Sunday evening, his younger brother Octave would come to his house and they would play euchre—two old men in ratty cardigans, bickering in Walloon, the dialect of their native Belgium.

Though he traversed an ocean and half a country to get to Vincennes, once he arrived, he wanted nothing to do with travel. The farthest he ever strayed from Vincennes was to Fence Lake in Wisconsin for a family vacation. He was miserable the whole time, and as is customary of miserable people everywhere, he made sure everyone was aware of it.

Despite his regular forays into misery, I looked forward to our visits to Vincennes, when Grandpa and I would retreat to his workshop and make stools, birdhouses, or whatever struck our fancy. His workshop contained electric tools cobbled together from discarded equipment others had thrown away. I can't count the times I was shocked by an improperly wired drill or saw. He acquired his lumber from piles of debris at building sites or broken-down furniture from the curb. My bedside table is made of cherry and walnut he scavenged from a cupboard a neighbor had set out for the trash collector.

He came to woodworking early in life, when his father pulled him from school at the age of 13 to work in a glass-cutting factory hammering together pallets. Grown men were away fighting World War I, jobs at the factory went unfilled, and my great-grandfather decided a sixth-grade education was sufficient for his oldest son, so Grandpa went to work, 12 hours a day, six days a week. For the next 10 years, he gave every paycheck to his parents, keeping his last one when he married my grandmother in 1927.

They were married at 7:30 in the morning at my grandfather's insistence, so they could drive all day to visit my grandmother's family in West Virginia. Two years later, they purchased a home in Vincennes for the princely sum of \$1,600. A month after that, the stock market crashed, ushering in the Great Depression. For the rest of his life, he began every conversation with the words, "Why, when I was young, we had nothing. No one had anything. We were all broke."

I never knew his parents, my great-grandparents. My mother said they were warm and loving, but when my grandfather was a boy, his father denied him an education and his mother threw an ax at him, striking him in the arm. I can't imagine why parents would do that to their children, and it bothers me that their DNA comprises part of my genetic essence.

I look for signs that I might be like them, a fleeting impulse to subject my sons to child labor or snatch up an ax and hurl it at them. Fortunately, my grandfather disrupted the pattern. While he could be grouchy, he insisted his children attend college, and as far as I know, never took an ax to anyone.

Grandpa was equally gruff with all 10 of his grandchildren. On the few occasions he was optimistic, he hid it behind a facade of pessimism. When I purchased my house, he would never enter without predicting my eventual bankruptcy. But every now and then, the curtain would part and his nobler qualities would shine forth. He loved children—right up until they could talk, then they annoyed him. Until then, he was the ideal grandpa, balancing babies on his knee and cooing to them in Walloon.

My Grandpa went to church every Sunday, volunteered as a Boy Scout leader, helped his sick neighbors, and taught woodworking at the Senior Center three days a week. He gave America a school principal, a special education teacher, a farmer, an Army medic, a pro golfer, two nurses, an executive, a marketing expert, a minister, two pharmacists, a salesman, a writer, and a steady stream of college graduates who have improved thousands of lives and paid millions of dollars in taxes. I don't think that's uncommon. Indeed, I suspect it's the norm for every family who has lived in America as long as ours.

#### Grandparents and Grandchildren

- a gift and a blessing from God that today we take the time to honour  
so I invite all who are able to stand  
and to join with me in speaking the words on the screen