

ESTRANGED

COPING
STRATEGIES
FOR
(GRAND)
PARENTS

PATTY ANN

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Coping Strategies for (Grand)Parents

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Dedicated to

P, A, D, D, S, M, J, K, N, R, H
and all who have been
estranged from their kin and
courageous enough to share their stories.

All names in this book have been changed.

***THE FOLLOWING PAGES
ARE A PREVIEW OF
SAMPLE CHAPTERS***

Foreword

There was an occurrence one day that led to a realization: grandparents are not infallible. All those years in youth where one fantasizes that the elders are wise old warriors—and then our turn came. And with it we stood not far from imperfection, according to our children. It's the new pandemic. The concept of abandoning (grand)parents has become a closely held acceptable alternative in the eyes of our kids. Boldly they ditched our nest in search of their own autonomy. The true victims? Our grandchildren who became caught in the web of confusion as the sandwich generation gallantly held fast their ground. Idealistic, right, and resolved took our adult offspring into a land of self-declaration.

This book is not one person's story, but the story of many. It harvests savvy ways of coping, and timeless lessons presented in a new light. Parents, grandparents, adult children, and older grandchildren will benefit from the tidbits and tales offered here.

This is a collection of openly shared stories told by many. Certainly, this narrative points out the obvious turbulence inside those who struggle for answers in search of resolution; however, this book shares ideas for tackling the dynamics of a very real relationship issue. There is a primary key focus to this book: to deliver strategies for managing your happiness while overcoming what seems to be an insurmountable obstacle.

Choice and less victim hood play an integral role in fragile outcomes. In the end, readers will gain another perspective for a new generation of challenges and choices.

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Coping Strategies for (Grand)Parents

Leaving Grace Behind

Two, three, four years plus days more yield a tempered view of loss. Two years does not gentle our demeanor, and yet with rage so great, we each succumb. One by one we give in, like the yielding outgoing tide on the night of a full moon. There is no other recourse *but* to concede. There is no other option *but* to give up—temporarily, then wait.

This loss is great. Leaving a hole in one's heart. There is no kindness that souls torn can repair. At least none that is known to its recipients. Our options have been many—tried, true, then torn. What if we were mighty as God? Would we then receive his endless bounty? Or would he stay the course with his plan?

The universe allows us, in her grace, a blueprint. Experience to learn from and—gosh forbid—grow once more. But we don't deem it natural, or even reasonable. We recoup our losses. We surrender. We follow, in no particular order, the stages of grief, which are: Denial, Isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. The last of which us grandparents will not accept because our grandchildren and children are not physically dead.

Tough Truths:

Time and loss are intangible shadows;
How you feel right now is what counts;
Only when you surrender can you rebuild;
Loss without physical death can be just as painful.

Fables Unfold

This is not a fable, but a story largely untold except in coffee circles among friends. Or bantered about through emails. Or whispered across garden beds so richly sowed. It is not news that we grandparents care to brag about to others. For admitting such gossip somehow suggests the event was at our own undoing. We are angry that such a deed is bestowed onto us, that the unrest of our own flesh and blood should perch such an unearthly sin unto us. A folly so greatly committed as to deny our living breathing blood relations be swept from the privilege of our—granted, few—grandparent moments.

The universe has a grand scheme; of that there is no doubt. There is some lesson on a monstrous scale that is provoked. It is said that when one door closes, another opens, yet many of our eyes fail to see this logic. We must trust. One must believe this cosmos has a rational balance of equality when all things are said and done. Balance comes in hints and waves of euphoria mixed inside depression. Riding such a roller coaster is the new ‘normal’ for this odyssey of time when the legend of family makes little sense.

Life’s Content is Often Twisted:

Many beliefs are based on antiquated fables;
Share, connect, feel, trust, and find balance;
There is a grand design upon our lives—trust it;
Sometimes lessons are understood at a later time.

Perseverance through Perspective

This sobering story is about finding perspective. And, relatively speaking, there is none, immediately, except to unravel the tangled folds to make some sense of your journey.

In your twenties, you never conceived of becoming a grandparent. It was reserved for the old. But being a parent was imminent, closer, and a glimmer that held promise. Being a ‘good’ parent, you throw yourself wholeheartedly into your role. Never a thought crossed your mind that your child should invalidate you some day. And, in favor of some misguided notion, your child actually tosses you aside like garbage.

Ridiculous behaviors are what parenthood patches up. When B-B gun holes plunked through the neighbor’s window, tattle tells it’s from your side of the house. Or being accidentally informed of last-minute party cleanup just before parent arrival. Party? Who knew! All the town did! Not just shenanigans, but endless first steps graced our children’s school years.

The first dates, first cars, first breakups, first skip days, first prom outfits, first vacations with friends only. The list was endless. And most all, us parents will agree, those growing-up years were a downright hoot. All hormonally driven, these sporadic teenage behaviors, we as parents took in stride and survived. Because we did it too, and endured.

Next phase. Serious stuff. They, being our children, did grow up. Some stayed solemnly single. Some marry, or intend to. Many offspring opted to have families.

If fortunate, you become a grandparent, by blood relation or by marriage. Empty nest aside, us grandparents doubly cherished that our children and grandchildren were an intrinsic part of our intact family. Bittersweet, though; for too many families this was/is not even an option.

Look Past What is Obvious:

Perspective is a powerful antidote;

The birth, life, transition cycles are ongoing, perpetually so;

Families are organic, dynamic, living, breathing behaviors;

Behaviors do not define the person—up to a point, that is.

Friends, Family, and Fodder

As a natural path most people find good friends, then disclosures begin. And the abandonment of grandchildren at the hand of children becomes a prevalent topic. Had I not been listening before? Was this a new paranormal activity, like the onset of bipolar which triggers inside one's mind?

At once, several close friends intrigued me with their stories of abandonment. Each wove the same thread that started with their offspring impregnated with the thought of being wronged. And in their kids' judgments of feeling star-crossed, or impaled with the idea that Mommy or Daddy did them wrong, something snapped.

Their easy solution was to slam the book shut on that chapter of their lives. Segregating parents to a recessed part of the brain does not work. Counseling might. Facing facts of learned behaviors can. Soul-searching and self-examination plus maturity *will* work. For each friend, it was entirely different; nonetheless, the parallels were immensely the same. For one mom, Jean, it was the onset of a divorce which triggered the mass exodus of her children. Jean experienced a collapse of kin within what seemed moments. All that time of doting, raising, honoring each child. Jean was dumbfounded. Even though her kids pushed her, advised her, that divorce should be so.

Yet, in the reality, Jean's kids got tainted by her ex. And, like a gigantic snowball inked in red that continued to bleed, this snowball grew to humongous proportions. The kids refused to talk to Jean without accusations. The ordeal grew further. An observer remarked that it must have been more fun for the kids to keep the divorce drama alive. Suffice to say the grand babies disappeared inside the crevasses of confusion.

Since meeting other grandparents, there lies a boardwalk nailed with similar fates. In story after story, I find kids abandoning their parents over some misdeed they believe their parents did to them. And from there, the foolishness falls apart. Sometimes the parents don't even know what was said to impart the hatred. Their kids just hate them and then take their offspring with them.

It swirls from a stem of the children believing they have been wronged. Deductive reasoning seems to elude our children's judgments, or perhaps perceptions become misguided. Thereafter, any little incompatible tidbit becomes fuel adding flames to boost their fire. It is a harvest gone to seed before the opportunity to ripen presents itself.

Generational Thoughts:

The natural path is to be connected to family;
Distorted minds rationalize the derailment of families;
Many suffer similar fates, connecting is supportive;
Perceived misdeeds are the catalyst of controversy.

Grandparents as Caregivers

We all know the dance: your child needs help with babysitting, which becomes a habit. Your child may need a place to call home for a while. The short-term stay becomes extended. Grandparents fall back into a familiar footstep called parenting. It get too cozy. No boundaries and assumptions are made and your child settles in without thought. Then one day she/he disappears. Off she/he goes into the arms of a new partner, a new drug, or some other decoy—sadly, taking your grandchild too.

Your life revolved 24/7 around your grand baby And now your purpose turns from childcare to hating what happened. How could your child be so ungrateful? How dare she/he strip you of your grandchild! Well, it happens—all the time.

Helping children, particularly when they have a child, is natural. Logic screams that the grand baby is helpless, a dependent, and does not deserve a transient mode of living. So you help, believing stability will prevail.

But who are you helping? Are you doing your son or daughter a favor, or is it serving yourself? Do you ever think of the future? Yes, they will leave, but how and on whose terms? Did you set up expectations when they first came in the door?

A helping hand with some guidelines is great. Once a child reaches childbearing age and has one of their own, they need to take responsibility for their own family's welfare. Have you discussed, demonstrated, or showed your child how to be independent? Or are you enabling them to take advantage of your weaknesses—namely your parental love and co-dependencies?

These are difficult questions that must be confronted. Family dynamics are often obscure and descend much deeper. An honest self-examination may give you clues as to why your children leave.

Tough Decisions Equal Easier Outcomes:

Lifestyle habits can be the culprit for future estrangements;
Place boundaries around child and grandchild handouts;
Set time lines, expectations, and consequences for help offered;
Raise children to be independent adults;
Self-examinations help one to understand family patterns.

2 Way Street

The grandparents who were interviewed for this book are not classified in the following section. The reasons kids and grandchildren become estranged from grandparents are multiple. Grandparents can be pushy, controlling, and live through their offspring in unhealthy ways. Then they wonder why their kids act the exact same way! When children want to become their own person and desire the space to do so, Mom or Grandma should not step in with an opinion.

Free will is an important part of growing and no one should be denied their birthright. While sons and daughters see fault with the grandparents, it is also the grandparents that can help generate this very sin. Grandparents, sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, and sons-in-law alike are destined to confuse the grandchildren in the crossfire. *STOP* being selfish. Step away from who you are—your behavior. Make the most of reconciliation. Then move forward.

Often we cannot see our own flaws. Not only can we not see them; we refuse to examine the role we play in aggravating our children. A counselor can help begin to unwind our paradigms. A good one will help you evaluate practices and lay a new foundation for helping you modify behaviors so your relationships can benefit. Time in counseling can be a pivotal point and money well spent. Be open to change and be willing to confront yourself.

A Wise Granny Says All Things Are Not Equal:

The purpose of an estrangement is multifaceted;
All behavior is learned; it is a generational habit profoundly stuck;
Grandchildren suffer the most when family dynamics grow wild;
Stopping the cycle means stopping the habitual behavior;
Moving forward equals commitment to change;
Counselors may be helpful to break family cycles.

Time Out

Remember when your children were young and you gave them time outs for inappropriate actions? Well, now that they are young adults acting out, use this same concept once again on your son or daughter. Divorcing your children is not a terrible idea. Even if you are on good terms.

Giving the gift of space will allow you to become more in tune with your own needs. Parent and pamper yourself instead. Spend your grandchild money on you... better still, indulge in something frivolous, something the frugal you would not normally consume.

Finding your own rhythms will help you recognize your true needs that may have gone unmet. Some benefits of this family break also include that you can stop hearing the word *Grandma* for a bit. Go back to using your real name. This will enable your own identity again. *NOT* being addressed as *Grandma* or *Grandpa* will leave you mentally feeling younger.

If your child wants space, gladly give it to them. Take a vacation and enjoy your new time out.

Give Yourself a Well-Deserved Break, Starting Today:

Time outs can be used for the good;

Use your given name and reclaim your own identity;

Vacations tap your true needs gone unmet;

The gift of space allows one to relax and mature.

The New Normal

All parties will eventually emerge from ground zero. How the relationships evolve is owned by all concerned. Be very certain the thereafter will not resemble the beforehand. And it should not.

Who steps up to break the ice is entirely optional. This is not time for back steps to whence we came. Dialog will be uncertain, yet this time is for new opportunity to explore. This is not kiss and makeup and back to old business. Go slow.

New paths must be discovered as old trails are closed. Make no mistake; forging uncharted waters will cut through rough currents. Now is not a time of expectations; rather open minds, and open hearts. No finger-pointing. No eye rolls or sneers.

Body language speaks louder than words and accounts for ninety percent of any conversation. Direct your body towards relaxation to listen.

What will a “new normal” look like or feel like? Grandma and Grandpa, it’s whatever you make it! Accept that if a person has experienced being cut off totally from family, this will be a big adjustment.

Grand-parents, if you have a hobby—great! It’s never too late to start brewing a new time-consuming interest. Don’t wait for this moment to pass. Passions consume the soul and bring purpose. This will help break family barriers and enable self-responsibility. It can bring life to conversations when you reconnect.

Live for today and live for *YOU*. Don't become complacent with how things are. For surely tomorrow will change family dynamics once again. Restructure can be productive, albeit uncomfortable for a while. A new normal takes conscious attention. It can and will be wonderful, dreamy, super-fun, and fantastic. You have the power to make it so!

The Purpose-Driven Rebuild:

A “new normal” is a new chance to forge new beginnings;
All parties need to own their part in the relationship;
Open minds and open hearts will forge new, common ground;
Being uncomfortable is a good indication of growth;
Your new relationship can be anything you both desire.

Boundaries

Boundaries are now imperative. For without them, chaos channels quietly and quickly. Spoken or written, the rules of engagement are vital to the survival of your reuniting family. Do not let this detail slip.

Grandparents, the burden of keeping the sanity will rest with you. Adult children will attempt to revert. Behaviors of such habits are mundane, ridiculous, harsh, or any other word that fits. Boundary behavior is good management and just plain prudent. It must be done with the grace of a songbird or the lurch of a buffalo. It does not matter, just get it done. For *YOU*.

That said, adult children also have their boundaries. If they provide distance from you, this means they have drawn a line. Respect it. Don't fret; children and grandparent alike will re-emerge. Only the cold hearted, or those seeking a more definite path, will withdraw permanently. Go easy and surrender.

There are different types of boundaries. Physical space can put much needed distance between all concerned parties. Verbal boundaries can dictate rules for engagement. These can come complete with consequences for unappreciated and/or agreed-upon actions. Your mental thoughts can track and place boundaries when others trespass lines of respect. A boundary is your capacity to ask, then receive a certain type of behavior. Boundaries need to include consequences for breaches of behavior. For without this final call, respect will be denied.

Boundaries are for Self-Preservation:

Initiate boundaries for self-care;
Safe keep your reuniting family;
Acknowledge boundary behaviors;
Know your choices are a healthy necessity.

Endings Bring Beginnings

One grandparent, Jack, wondered silently, what if he got deathly ill, or even terminally ill, would his children visit? Might there be remorse for time wasted? Would amends ever be met? Another grandparent surmised that, as the years continued to distance him from his kids, there would be no reconciliation.

One never knows when a door is about to shut. And for this reason everyone should plan for their own happiness today. There is no diminishing of the hurts felt. And often there is no turning back. Like a paddle wheel, this is nature's way of making us move in a direction of rebirth.

Go quietly or by storm; the door will never reopen with the same glow it once radiated. Stages of loss include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. These come in no particular order. Rest assured; on the other side of midnight lies paradise.

A Wise Granny Says Keep a Crack in the Door:

When one door closes, another opens;
An open door is opportunity for growth;
Growth makes us move forward;
Stages of loss are denial, anger, bargaining, and depression;
Acceptance comes when you master your lessons.

Forgiveness

Forgiving another is the cornerstone to rebuilding a relationship. Before you can forgive another person you must forgive *yourself*.

The injustice you are dealt by another is only a perception of your reality. Just as those who trespass upon you have their own perception.

Anger holds forgiveness hostage. Forgiveness is a choice to let go of resentment and grudges. Holding on to anger tethers you to inflamed emotions that can lead to long-term stress, anxiety, and other disorders. Breathe deep and release. Let go of taut restraints that hold you into thinking you are a victim. Only when you dispose of your anger in order to forgive can you move into acceptance.

Persuasions for Forgiving:

Be the angry victim, for a bit, then release that thought;
Acknowledge and validate your feelings around anger;
Make a choice to let go of your resentment;
Forgive the party you believe has offended you;
It is a conscious choice to forgive and be healthy;
Forgiving allows acceptance and peace.

Special Circumstances

We need to acknowledge that there are situations beyond the scope of this book. Grandchildren living in abusive environments and other unfortunate households deserve tender loving care.

Interventions of the court or social services are measures of extreme action that can be warranted. As well, children who may have mental disorders are in another category that warrants medical intervention. And the use of drugs by elders can wreak havoc and severely undermine family functioning.

Whether as a grandparent you decide how, when, or if to intercede is a thought-provoking personal choice. The welfare of your children and grandchildren is foremost and should be your guiding factor. Personal emotions, bias, and prejudices will have to be put on the back burner as one tasks themselves with such a purpose.

Seek professional guidance to think through a plan that benefits and serves your family best. In the end, if your child(ren) and their partner(s) do not participate, find peace in knowing you did what you knew best. Perhaps another time you may find family more receptive.

Suggestions of Personal Choice:

Get professional help as needed for direction;
Save the legal system to preserve the welfare of minors;
Remain objective; it is more productive;
Find peace with the outcome.

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