

Being mothered & grandmothered

By Constance Scrafield

It seems to me that an only child, more likely a female only child, might well begat only one child in her turn. This speculation is not based on much more than personal observation.

Not only was I an only child, on my mother's side of the family, I was an only grandchild, which was wonderful. My father came from a family of nine children, all of whom were married with two or more children.

It made for quite a crowd at Christmas when we clustered together in the home of one of the siblings for riotous, sometimes tumultuous, gatherings of what felt like, but was not actually, hundreds of people. It was fun having all those cousins, with whom I was, variously, quite close or barely knew them, depending on geography and inclination.

It was fun having no cousins on the other side. There was relative calm, where, for most of my youthful years, my maternal grandparents lived in a cottage in Clarkson, where I attended the century-old Clarkson Public School, at the end of Sunningdale Bend, from time to time.

Back in the most welcoming of homes, my grandmother, who was a nurse, had the kettle on and lunch was ready, whether we took it outside in the garden or snug in the tiny dining room my grandfather built, as an addition to the kitchen.

There were lessons there, taught with determination that I would learn about table manners, and wholesome food ? and grammar. Poetry, literature, the BBC, nature, conversations about everything, playing cards. Through it all with them both, was the humour, the sense of laughing at folly and enjoying beyond measure the lightness of laughter. There was time, you see, time and a real interest in their grandchild. Whatever they could give me by way love and learning, they did.

My mother was not much more than a kitten herself when I was born and she loved me devotedly. Once I was a teenager, she did find my disinclination to wear make-up and fuss about about my long, straight, fine hair, depressing. She worried about whether I was popular and when I was not upset about boyfriends, she was annoyed with me.

She was extremely well read, though, and our shared love of books and arts bonded us.

She used to read Shakespeare to me even before I was a teen. Likewise, the Greek philosophers: reading the words and watching me work with them, stretching my young mind around the enlightenment and the thoughts. And we laughed together, uproariously, about the world around us and the stories we shared from our individual days.

There was time, you see; she took the time because she found having a bright young person, her own beloved young person in her life, interesting, a gift.

When I introduce my own daughter to someone, I talk about having the honour to be her mother. By the time she was born, those other two mothers had gone. So, I designated myself to pass on as much as what they gave me as I could. My friends were allocated the responsibility of teaching her something of benefit and she had her own relationship with many adults, not dashing off with them alone, but within the household as visitors, talking to her as an viable individual, not an extension of myself.

Living in London, we have travelled extensively together within Europe, back to Canada and, once, to the glorious Seychelles.

When we returned to Canada to live, we owned horses and rode long kilometres together through the Hockley Valley. The camaraderie of riding includes the equines, a special companionship unique to sharing time with horses.

I bought her first piano when she was three and music is the mainstay of her professional life. A performer and vocal teacher, she urges her (especially younger) students to take their lessons as sincerely as she does.

At high school, she was beautiful and brilliant. As though compensating the grandmother she never met, she was careful about her makeup and her long shining hair. Her achievements were in keeping with who she is; writing the music for a school production that made its way to the Winter Garden Theatre in Toronto; organizing band events; publishing an ?extra? school paper in which she encouraged her fellow students to ?rant.? Years later, the school's teachers and staff remember her with respect and affection.

She and I love to hang out, sometimes with a bottle of decent wine, by the fireplace in winter and under the tent in the heat of summer. We talk about everything and laugh out loud at most of it.

Throughout her life, she has always been sure of my good opinion and my support in all she does. I will always have the time, you see; whatever I can give her by way of love and learning, I will.