

Karen Telleen-Lawton: Generations, and the Joy of Entering Grandmother-hood



Karen Telleen-Lawton with granddaughter Charlotte. (Alex Farrell Porter photo)



When my daughter faced the perennial childhood question of what she wanted to be when she grew up, she insisted her goal was to be a grandmother. With four energetic grandparents, grandparent time was special-event time. She and her brother and cousins played games, visited museums and beaches, and explored canyons and deserts with Dave's and my parents.

My folks and in-laws all loved to travel. Their postcards home were shared around the dinner table; our house was gradually knick-knacked with masks, baskets and toys from around the world. In our kids' eyes, they did nothing but play. Who wouldn't want to grow up to be a grandparent?

My own aspirations toward grandmother-hood grew in that ever-lengthening period between the kids' college graduations and marriage. I was dutifully concentrating on my own career, trying to be only peripherally interested in their adult lives without bordering on prying.

Then my friends' kids started having babies. I'm not one who has to keep up with the latest fashion, hairstyle or destination vacation, but the grandbaby thing hit me like desert thirst. Since I didn't want to whine to my kids, I practiced grandmother skills by inviting my precocious and adorable next-door neighbors for visits.

For several years my "foster granddaughters" and I colored Easter eggs using natural dyes like earth-toned onionskins and a brilliant red collected from cochineal bugs on opuntia cacti. Sometimes they helped me pull weeds or we'd walk the woodlands between our yards, carefully avoiding poison oak. At Christmastime they came to enjoy my creche collection and count the Baby Jesuses.

Meanwhile, I collected "stuff" for future arts and crafts projects. I have crayons, markers, stickers and stencils left over from our kids' childhoods. I have bags of dryer lint that I'm hoping we can use to make paper with a fine screen. (Does this work?) I have fabric, glue and posterboard.

Dave and I even plotted future grandkid-friendly vacations, hoping to take each one on a trip with us when they reach 12. But as the years ticked by, we began to wonder if we'd have to move up the 12-year-old trip to age 10 or earlier, so we wouldn't be too old for the types of adventures we wanted to have.

Early this year, our daughter and son-in-law revealed their secret package. We spent the year in joyful anticipation, allowing ourselves the guilty pleasure of mulling over grandparent names. I decided on Grandma Birdie (anticipating birding escapades and mimicking bird calls). Dave wanted his name to evolve, as did my parents "Moki" and "Baba."

In early November, I began leaving my cell phone on at night, waiting for The Call. We were packed and ready, but we still flew into a flurry of mad action when the text came. Charlotte satisfied her mother's desire for a nice birth date by emerging at 11 on 11/12/12.

For several days we cradled, cooked, cleaned, marketed and gardened to help them bridge the gap between adrenaline and exhaustion. We kept our cell phones on at night in our nearby motel, in case of a midnight meltdown. Charlotte's perfection brought them through it all.

Now we're home again. Mom, Dad and baby — as well as Birdie and Grandad, Moki and Baba — are doing fine. And Emily, an estate-planning attorney and brand-new mom, is now just a generation from Grandmother-hood.

— Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations spanning sustainability from the environment to finance, economics and justice issues. She is a fee-only financial advisor (www.DecisivePath.com) and a freelance writer (www.CanyonVoices.com).