



Grandparenting 101

By Eleanor Vincent

It was 4:30 on a Friday afternoon. Most of the cubicles around me were deserted.

My boss was still at her computer when I dashed into her office.

"You have *got* to see this," I said breathlessly. "You won't believe it!"

I stood there grinning, already a proud grandmother. "Meghan's ultrasound," I said. Still early in her pregnancy, my daughter had e-mailed me a 3-dimensional real-time video of the results.

Caren smiled and immediately rose from her chair.

She followed me back to my desk. When I played the 30-second clip, she gasped and reached for my hand. We looked at each other, our eyes misting up. "Unbelievable," we said in unison, squeezing hands.

As Boomer-era moms, Caren and I have always worked, juggling the demands of raising kids with a career. Now I wonder how on earth we did that. Becoming a grandparent means that my daughter and I will face work-life balance issues from different vantage points. Already, my heart is honing in on this new being, whom we later learned will be a girl. For this baby, I won't be the one to ride the career-family see-saw. My daughter will, and I'm curious to see how she does.

Meghan is already planning her juggling act: arranging a work-at-home schedule and back-up babysitting and networking with other mothers-to-be. She gave me a copy of the *Hip Grandma's Handbook* for Mother's Day to help me get up to speed. Reading about the adventures other grandmothers have with their grandkids, I realized the bar has been raised. These days, being a grandparent means being involved, even if you have to fly across the country to do it.

Because Meghan and her husband live in San Francisco, which is only 30 minutes away from me, I won't have to get on a plane to see my granddaughter or settle for a Christmas holiday here and a weekend in Disneyland there. I'll be a hands-on grandmother. I'm thrilled. But I'm also wondering how I'll balance this new love of my life with a full-time job. Who knew I'd be shopping for a car seat at the age of 61?

Like many in my generation I'm at that awkward stage—old enough to know the Social Security check will soon be in the mail, but still too young to stop working. Lots of working grandparents actually raise their grandchildren. I'm one of the lucky ones: I just have to figure out how to juggle occasional babysitting with trips to the zoo. I get to spoil the little muffin and then hand her back to mommy and daddy. Nonetheless, I worry that working will take time away from my grandchild, and vice versa. Issues of work-life balance seem to persist at every stage of life.

I recently visited my sister and brother-in-law. They take care of their granddaughter, a chubby, strong-willed 13-month-old, while my niece teaches third grade. At one point in the visit, I stood by holding a diaper in one hand and baby wipes in the other. I had to drop them both to help my sister corral a squirming bare-bottomed baby determined to thwart our intentions. We were literally puffing and panting by the end of the ordeal.

"In your wildest dreams," I said, "Did you ever think we'd be wrestling your grandbaby to the ground?"

"You're a grandmother-in-training," my sister replied, "Get used to it!"

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