

Grandpa's Visit

Patti Hanks

MY HUSBAND'S PARENTS, Grandma and Grandpa Hanks, live in Utah and come to visit our family in Michigan every summer. We all look forward to their visits, especially our children. Grandpa is pleasant and takes a detached interest in the children. Sometimes he mixes them up with his other grandchildren, and he has a hard time remembering their ages and accomplishments, but he is always very kind. He usually spends most of his time talking with my husband about church and work—his own and his son's. He likes to get away for a golf game when he can and sometimes falls asleep in the evenings in his favorite chair.

The kids are okay with all that because Grandpa always brings Grandma, and Grandma is the one they really dig. She always arrives with a suitcase full of treats. Nestled in among her carefully folded clothes are Ziploc bags bulging with crunchy caramel corn, Cheerios-peanut-butter balls, wrapped in waxed paper and then in foil, and homemade chocolate suckers with accordion folded dollar bills tied to their sticks with ribbons. She knows the full name, age, and current passion of each child and shares any and all of their mother's concerns about behavior, schoolwork, and the general vicissitudes of growing up. In addition to treats for the whole family, each child usually gets something just for him or her, like baseball cards, just the book she's been wanting to read, a sheet of favorite music, or a Utah Jazz souvenir. Grandma spends her visits reading joke books with the kids, taking them for walks, rocking and singing to the little ones, letting them help in the kitchen while she makes even more treats, including her specialty—homemade ice cream.

Once it crossed my mind what it would be like if Grandpa were to show up alone. Say he had a consulting job near our home and arrived without her. How would that go over? He might tell the kids that because Grandma was delicate or getting along in years, he was afraid she'd get worn out on the long plane ride. Besides, he might add, the airport was a crowded and dirty place, and their grandmother, who was lovely and sensitive and very orderly, just needed to be home where she

could be protected from all that. He'd surely tell them about the important project she was working on for the people in their Utah ward and make the kids understand why that project was more important right now than spending time with her grandchildren. Of course, he would add, "I bring all Grandma's love just as if she were here. I've brought hugs and treats from her, and when I go home, I'll tell her all about my visit. If you have anything you want to say to her, well, just tell me, and I'll report to her what you've said." Grandpa might say all of that, but how would it sound if he added, "By the way, everyone, while I'm here, let's please just not talk about Grandma? Okay?"

It would be nice to have Grandpa at our house—even without Grandma, and I am sure that he would do his best to explain why Grandma had stayed at home. He would reassure the children that she would be out for a visit sometime very soon, and he would probably unpack some of those treats—might even play a little catch in the yard and take us all out for ice cream—but he would likely spend most of his time talking with my husband about work and church. It really wouldn't be the same at all, not for the kids—not for anyone.