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## **The Magical Stardust of Grandparents**

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A towheaded young boy and a grandfatherly looking man dressed in worn jeans and a John Deer cap seated themselves across from me in the doctor's waiting room. The boy seemed a little anxious and fidgety so I assumed he was there for a medical matter. Sensing the child's discomfort, the grandfather gently drew him close, putting his arm around his shoulders and softly whispering that everything would be OK. Noticing a storybook on the adjacent table, the grandfather picked it up. Oblivious to a crowded room of onlookers, he began reading the book to his grandson, animatedly punctuating and embellishing the story with a variety of wild animal sounds and silly voices. Snuggled in the safety of his grandfather's arms, the little boy giggled gleefully, leaving his worries behind and becoming lost in the story and the love of his grandfather.

As I watched the two, I was reminded of the important role of grandparents—one that no one else can fill. Alex Haley once said that grandparents sprinkle stardust over the lives of children. It is a special, magical relationship replete with a wealth of opportunities to listen, nurture and share skills and talents with grandchildren. Grandparents provide maturity, wisdom and most importantly, unconditional love. As mentors, they can have invaluable and significant impact on the success and psychological well-being of their grandchildren. The role of grandparenting is typically a combination of parent, teacher and friend. Grandparents are parents who have a second chance—a chance to do it over again, laughing and playing more, worrying less about what others think and savoring every precious moment.

Grandparents can provide a delightful place of escape where a child can go to be pampered—the adult equivalent of a spa-vacation. When my daughter was young, Miss Christine, a lady from our church became an adopted grandparent and mentor. Chantelle would often visit her on Sunday afternoons and they would play in the parlor of her turn-of-the-century home, enjoying tea parties, dolls and long talks. Oreo cookies were Chantelle's favorite treat and Miss Christine always made sure plenty were on hand. One day when I came to pick her up, I spotted a large plate of Oreo wafers with the insides mysteriously missing and some of the creamy evidence still on my daughter's face. Knowing this lady was retired and could ill afford to be wasteful, I began scolding Chantelle. As I rambled on, Miss Christine quietly reminded me, "Every child needs a place where it's OK to eat just the frosting and leave the rest behind!"

Her words aptly describe the important respite that grandparents can provide. Parenting is a rewarding but often overwhelming job that sometimes leaves both parents and children ready for a mutual break. Chantelle illustrates this concept as she describes visits with her own grandparents: "I remember my

grandparents' house being a place I could really be a kid. It was definitely an escape from the chaos at our house. Their house smelled like waffles and syrup on a Saturday morning and was always filled with activity, surrounded by a garden of flowers year-round. I usually spent a couple of weeks there during the summer. Grandmother would always ask me to list my "menu" for the week as soon as I arrived so I ate my favorite foods every night. We spent the days crafting or cooking together, hobbies which I still enjoy to this day. These were happy times and I always felt loved, special and adored!"

Now it is my turn. Chantelle and her husband are expectant adoptive parents. The nursery is beautifully and creatively decorated, ready for a child who will have wonderful parents and a very special place in our family. And as I eagerly await my grandchild's arrival, I can't wait to fill the air with some sparkling, magical stardust of my own.