



grandmother here, they get an idea that there's a lot of other people out there and a lot of people that lived before them."

### Grandchildren See Benefits

We found evidence of mutuality across all the interviews we did with grandchildren. In one instance, a nine-year-old talked about how fortunate she is to have her grandmother living in a cottage in the backyard. They live in a small town in Georgia, and both her parents travel with their work. Julie said, "If my mom is going away, and my dad is going away the same day, then I'll spend the night at my grandma's. That way, I don't have to deal with a babysitter." When asked if she saw anything else as a benefit to being near Grandma, she replied, "Since she's so close, we don't have to wait until a vacation to see her." Certainly, Julie's comments argue in favor of the proximity dividend.

In another case, a nine-year-old grandson talked about the benefits he receives from both of his grandparents living in a cottage in the backyard. Peter lives in a residential community in Northern California, where his mother is a homemaker and his father is a general contractor. When asked to give examples of what he did with his grandparents, he responded, "After school I go over there and they help me do homework. I have snacks and stuff. We also watch TV and play card games." In addition, he said they worked in the household garden together, growing "flowers, carrots, pumpkins, and squash." Of course, as a result of this interaction, the chances are good that Peter will have his own garden when he grows up.

Further testimony that grandchildren see benefits came from an interview with three teenage sisters. It was their father who, in 1996, approached his in-laws about the idea of buying a place together. In his case, his family with three young children needed more space and wanted a swimming pool. In turn, his wife's parents were tired of taking care of their big house. It made perfect sense to all of them to combine financial resources and buy a place together in a small residential town in Northern California. For several years now the maternal grandparents have lived in a guesthouse behind the swimming pool in the backyard. In separate interviews with the grandparents, the parents, and the grandchildren, I (Sharon) learned that the living arrangement has worked beautifully for all of them.

The granddaughters told wonderful stories about how they have profited by living so close to their grandparents. They talked about getting help with homework, learning about values and family history, being driven places, attending sport events, and receiving advice on shopping. In addi-



tion, they mentioned the importance of a strong family connection as a deterrent to negative behavior. They also gave accounts of the downside of being nearby. They talked about noise issues, such as having to be quiet in the hot tub at night, being interrupted when doing homework on the computer in the family room, and having to introduce a boyfriend to four adults, instead of two parents. Here is what they had to say about their “grand” relationships.

*Sharon:* Have you heard of other people participating in a living arrangement similar to the one you have with your grandparents?

*Kristine (age fifteen):* I don’t have very many friends who have that situation. When I mention it to them, they go, “Oh, that’s so cool that your grandparents live with you.” Because their grandparents live far away or in another part of the country.

*Sharon:* What do you like about your housing situation?

*Margaret (age thirteen):* It’s really cool because if you need something like sugar, you can walk over and get some. But, like, if we have any questions that our parents can’t answer, they just tell us to go over and ask Grandpa. So we just go and talk to him.

*Sharon:* Do you have a specific example of a question?

*Catherine (age seventeen):* Yes. Grandpa knows a lot about our family history. So with him being a lot older, I want to make sure that we get the real story now. I’ll ask him, “How did Great Uncle Ralph get here?” I have a little tape recorder that I’ve used to tape our conversations. He’s a great storyteller. I’m just passionate about learning about our family’s history and also American history. I don’t know if I would be interested in history if it wasn’t for him.

*Sharon:* Anything else you want to add in terms of what you like about your housing situation?

*Margaret:* Besides getting sugar and food from them, I had a situation once when I was doing my homework and needed help with a math problem. I asked my mom if she could look at it with me. She is not a pro at math like my dad is, but he wasn’t home. She said, “Just go ask Grandpa.” So I did, and, in no time, we had figured it out.





*Kristine:* Also, what I like about living with them is they help a lot with driving. I'm still fifteen, so I'm not able to drive yet. Sometimes, my sister drives me places, and so does my mom. But at times, if I'm stuck someplace, or if I need to get somewhere and no one can take me, it's really good to be able to walk over and ask them to drive me places.

*Catherine:* Over the summer we played a lot of water polo across the bay. I had a game at 3:30 one afternoon, and Grandpa and Nani had driven across the bay and surprised me! I didn't know they were coming. They brought their own chairs. I just remember when I was playing and would score, I'd hear, "Way to go, Cathy!" I'd look up, and there Grandpa would be standing with the college shirt he always wears and his glasses. It was like having another set of parents right there, encouraging you at a sports event. It's really special. A lot of people don't even have their parents there, let alone their grandparents.

*Sharon:* Anything else you want to add? Have you thought about other ways that it's helped you out in your life, having your grandparents around?

*Kristine:* Nani is a great shopper. She buys us clothes for Christmas. She is a very wise shopper. If I need any advice on sizes or colors, she is always an expert there to help me.

*Catherine:* Just being older, I know that I've grown up with values that I've gotten from both my church and my family. I feel like, as a family, we respect older people. I see we are nice kids with great values.

*Kristine:* It's like the values you learn from the relationship with your grandparents carry into other activities with your friends. Just knowing that helps.

*Margaret:* I go to my friend's house or we're setting up a play date, but then they say, "I can't, my grandparents are coming." I never think twice about saying, "My grandparents are coming." They are already here, so my friends can come over without feeling like they're butting in on "company."

*Kristine:* When our grandparents come over for dinner, it's not like having company over, since they're already part of our family. Nani always does the dishes at our house. If she is over here and the dishes are piling up, she'll come into the kitchen, and when she leaves the sink is all clean. I'm sure our mother appreciates that a lot.





*Margaret:* I think it's a plus for parents, too, because they could never leave the kids home alone once they're in high school. There will never be wild parties thrown or anything like that.

*Sharon:* Is there anything you dislike about your living arrangement?

*Catherine:* It was hard sometimes when I would be writing papers or we would be in the family room, and they'd walk in from their domino night. They would interrupt us, wanting to visit. You know, while you're doing homework, you have that surge of energy. Then your grandparents walk in, and it stops.

*Kristine:* One day, I had a really bad day and I stayed home. Nani asked how my day was going. Truthfully, I was in the mood to just go to my room and not think of anything. But, instead, I found myself having to explain my whole day to her. I wasn't in the mood to tell my grandmother what was going on. But I felt like I needed to tell her, since she was there and asked me to.

*Sharon:* What would you change about your living arrangement if you could change anything?

*Catherine:* I don't think I would change anything. It's so fun. We have such a strong family connection and I think it's definitely because we are living with our grandparents.

*Sharon:* Would you recommend your living arrangement to your friends?

*Margaret:* Definitely. I think it helps a lot for the parents too. If they are going out of town or they are out for the night, then they don't have to hire a babysitter. If there is an emergency, you just run over there. I think if everyone had a grandparent living with them, there would probably be a lot less problems, because they could have the extra help.

*Catherine:* One of my closest friends is Alicia. Her grandma doesn't live with them, but will come over every day. She lives in a neighboring city. She is another example of someone with a close relationship to a grandparent. Her parents are married and are close. They have two kids and are just a great, close, functioning family. I would recommend it. Kids would grow up in a more healthy environment.

