



them to take him there. To their surprise, they had a good time! In fact, not only were they anxious to see how their creative project turned out, but they have indicated an interest in going back.

My other grandson, Christopher, was born in 2002. His emerging interests are centered around gardening, vehicles, and tool projects, following the pursuits of his dad and grandfather. Two years ago, his great-grandmother and I had fun working together to create a needlepoint alphabet picture for him. Now he likes to read too. I am truly blessed to have such wonderful grandchildren!

In another case, a fitness instructor shares a house with her husband, his daughter, and his daughter's three children. The daughter has a separate apartment downstairs and they live upstairs. Dorrie spoke to us about the advantages she has experienced from this type of living arrangement.

*Dorrie:* I think some of the benefits of their living with us is that we've gotten closer to the kids than we would have if they were living someplace else. Not having had children myself—you know Denise is my stepdaughter—I was dropped into being a grandmother. So for me it has been certainly more experience with young children than I'd had before. That is advantageous, I do believe, for me. For both of us, I think that having young children

#### **Room for Thought 5.2. Designed for Family Life**

And while many observers assume that economy-driven multigenerational living is an emotionally traumatic hardship, that's another myth. The truth? Many grandparents tell us not only that they love having their family back under their roof; they also love being needed again. They say it brings purpose to their days, and meaning to their lives. The physical demand of keeping up with the kids makes them feel younger; outdoor play burns off both calories and tension; and helping with homework provides excellent mental stimulation.

There's a lesson here. We humans are built for family life. In a crisis, or after a disaster, it's always family that gets us through. Children must be fed, dressed, and taken to school, so we rally and we do it with a smile. In fact, studies have found that the more we act like everything is okay, the more we actually believe that everything is going to be okay. Family living forces us to have regular, face-to-face contact, which reduces isolation and wards off depression. The predictable routines of family life reduce stress; the act of nurturing, researchers have found, triggers innate biochemical stress-antidotes.

*Source:* George Witkin, Ph.D., "When Families Live Together: A Survival Guide," *Grandparents.com*, accessed January 11, 2012.



around helps keep us young and gives us a different perspective on life. You know, we're at a certain point where we wouldn't reach out to that younger generation otherwise. You just kind of get into your routine. I think that is a real advantage for us and helps keep us current in the world and in a more youthful culture.

Indeed, grandchildren can provide their grandparents with opportunities to be curious about nature, to be excited about life, and to be playful. As Michael Prichard says, "You don't stop playing because you grow old; you grow old because you stop playing."

We interviewed another grandmother who lives in a house across the street from her daughter, son-in-law, and two grandsons in a small residential community in Northern California. She tells wonderful stories about the interaction between her pet turtle and her grandsons, as well as a special trip to the zoo.

*Sharon:* Do you have any special activities that you enjoy doing with your grandsons?

*Jean:* Well, we have a couple of things. I ended up adopting a turtle a few years ago. He came to visit me, and I ended up saving his life because he was trying to cross the street. I didn't know what I was going to do with him, but I went and got some grass and put him in our backyard. Now he is our pet turtle, and the boys just love to come over and see him. We have named him Ernie. Ernie goes into hibernation in August and the boys know we can't find him from August until around Easter time. So they start asking in February, "Is Ernie back?" They like to come over and feed Ernie dandelions, and it's really fun. It's a very unusual thing. Ernie has been with me now for almost three years.

*Sharon:* Have you bought any books on turtles?

*Jean:* Yes. This particular turtle is called a redneck slider. The boys and I didn't know what he ate, so we went to the pet store and got some turtle food, which was terribly expensive. Then by mistake one day, one of my little ones gave him a dandelion and we found out that he loves dandelions. Now we don't need to buy the expensive turtle food. Also, right now, outside my kitchen window, I have a bird in a bird's nest. The oldest boy comes over and checks the bird in the nest every day. So I've got nature close by.

*Sharon:* Do you take trips to the zoo?





*Jean:* Yes, we do. My fiancé and I took Martin to the zoo a month ago. We told him that we were going to have a mystery trip. I said, “I’ll tell you, if you want, or we’ll keep it a surprise.” He decided he wanted a surprise. We headed to San Francisco and he immediately fell asleep. When we got there, I woke him up and said, “Okay, Martin, we are at our mystery location. Where do you think we are?” He had to figure out where we were. There was a construction project nearby. “We’ve come to see them build a house,” he said. I replied, “Not exactly.” So we got out of the car and I said, “Look at the flags.” He said, “Why do they have animals on the flags?” Then, all of a sudden, he realized where we were. He was thrilled! We had a wonderful time at the zoo.

Finally, after hearing a lecture extolling the benefits of three-generation households, Bill sent us an e-mail telling about his own experience. He is a retired physician who lives with his wife in Southern California. Here is what he had to say:

*Bill:* My wife and I enjoyed a few short years of three-generational living in a two-flat house in Chicago. We occupied the first floor. Our daughter and her husband and our two grandchildren lived above us. We sat around the same dinner table every night. Those were the happiest, richest, and most rewarding years of our lives. Today, those two grandchildren are outperforming all their peers. Both are graduates of Harvard. Our grandson earned a master’s degree in computer science at Harvard. He then went to Boalt Hall Law School at UC Berkeley and had his pick of law firms. His little sister is in her third year pursuing a doctoral degree in statistics at UC Berkeley. She was a math major at Harvard. Was three-generational living in their early formative years environment enriching? Yes!

### **A Granddaughter Looks Back**

We interviewed a landscape architect who currently lives with her husband in a small residential town in Southern California. Elizabeth was asked to recall the benefits of her childhood experience living next door to her maternal grandparents on a family farm in central California during the 1940s to 1960s. Her stories demonstrate the lifelong influence grandparents can have, which in her case determined a career choice.

*Sharon:* Tell me about your childhood housing situation.

*Elizabeth:* I was born in a small town in the Salinas Valley in an agricultural community where my family lived just at the edge of the town on our fam-

