

# A New Breed of Grandparents

by Tim Kimmel

Grandparents have changed. Today's grandparents are the graying remnant of a generation who managed to turn our country upside down when they were young. The average age of a first time grandparent is 47. They compute more and crochet less. They buy more and bake less. Their hand-painted Volkswagens have been replaced by SUVs or motor homes. They have exchanged tie-dye for Tai chi. And almost all have traded love beads for love handles.

The most significant change for this generation of grandparents is the strategic position they are being called upon to play in today's family structure. Whether their grandchildren live down the street, across the country or in the bedroom next to theirs, grandparents play an irreplaceable role in how their children and grandchildren turn out. It's not often that you get such a significant second chance to make a difference on earth and for eternity.

Our grandchildren are watching us. They are quietly taking notes with the hope that from what they learn they can take their cues for living a meaningful life. God has given them parents and teachers and coaches-good people from whom they will learn much. But it is us, their grandparents, who He has given the task of showing whether a life of faith can carry a person through to the end and ultimately enable them to finish strong.

A lot of you are young. You have the luxury of being actively involved in your grandchildren's lives. How we are living as grandparents now, while we're young and energetic, will play a significant role in how we are viewed when our physical limitations finally have their way. Our passionate commitment to being godly and gracious grandparents now will become the symbolic persona that our grandchildren will attach to us then.

Being a grandparent is a reminder to all of us that eventually we will run out of time. Although we may have a lot of years left on earth, there is most likely fewer years left ahead of us than there are behind us. What do you want your life to count for? What is your mission going to be for the rest of your life? Do you want it to be leisure? Do you want it to be the accumulation of more material possessions that you have to leave behind? Or do you want to use these last semesters of your life to make an eternal difference? Your role as a grandparent offers you one of the most significant opportunities to leave a legacy that never dies.

Several years ago, there were two grandparents lying in an Intensive Care Unit in a small-town hospital in Pennsylvania. One was a lady named Winnie. The other was a man who was a financial pillar of the community. Winnie was a high school graduate. The man across the room had an Ivy League education. Winnie had worked for slightly above minimum wage all of her life. The man was one of the titans of local industry. Winnie was dying with a couple hundred dollars in the bank. The man was dying with more money in the bank than most people make in five lifetimes. But the difference was

that Winnie was rich, and the dying man across the ICU really had little to show for his life.

They both had children and they both had grandchildren. For the entire time that they laid across the room from each other, Winnie had a constant stream of children and grandchildren coming to be by her side. The many people she had lived her life for were now traveling from all the points of the compass just to hold her hand and stand by her side to the end.

The man across the room had no visitors. He had lived for himself when he was young and had indulged himself as he got older. Now -- with time running out, he suddenly realized that it was too late. He had purchased all of the recognition, accolades, and applause he had received. But because he had not left his mark on the hearts of the people he loved, no one came to hold his hand and to weep over him when he died.

Late one evening, as the nurse was preparing him for a night of sleep, he inquired about the woman across the room with all the children and the grandchildren. The nurse told him her name and a little about her family. He asked, "What are her chances of surviving?" The nurse said, "None. She will be fortunate to live another few days." After a long pause, he said, "I wish I could change places with Winnie. I'd give everything I have to be what she is to her family."

Shortly after that night, Winnie died. And very soon, so did the man. People came from all over the country to say goodbye to Winnie. They stood outside in the rain for three nights for a chance to pay their last respects. Her children and grandchildren stood by her side--two generations of human beings who were eternally touched by this humble lady. The titan of business, the Ivy Leaguer who had followed her to the grave...well...he had more family members show up for the reading of his will than he had at his funeral. Winifred Olive Dean Kimmel, my Mom, has passed on a legacy that I now will pass on to my own children and grandchildren.

We grandparents are torchbearers, we're standard setters, we're blessing givers, we're legacy makers, we're bridges over troubled waters for a young and fragile generation. We are all making choices. Time will prove, and eternity will tell, whether or not our choices add up.

Our true epitaphs will not be carved in stone. They will be carved in the souls and memories of our children...of our grandsons and granddaughters. Regardless of what someone someday chooses to write about us on our tombstones, those words can never overwrite what we were. God leaves the last word on our lives to those we leave behind. We are all writing the epitaphs of our life on the hearts of our children and grandchildren. They will sum up our lives some day. And that sum total will have a deep and abiding effect on the lives that they end up leading.

We are not curators of the dead; we are stewards of the living. The children and grandchildren who must move into tomorrow surround us. Someday we will stand

before the God who bought our eternal souls on a cross. Now we are leaving a legacy. Then we will give an account. Between now and then is all the time we have left. Let's make good use of it.

Tim Kimmel and his wife Darcy are the authors of the video study *Grandparenthood: More Than Rocking Chairs*, a great resource for your church, for your home group, for your grandparents, or for yourself.

To order or for more information go to [www.Grandparenthood.net](http://www.Grandparenthood.net). Tim's next book (co-authored with his wife Darcy) is based on the Grandparenthood video series and is due out in 2008. Tim and Darcy have four children and two lovely granddaughters. He is also the Executive Director of [Family Matters](http://FamilyMatters.net), a non-profit ministry that equips families to appropriate God's grace in every age and stage of life. For more information about Tim, his books and his conferences go to [FamilyMatters.net](http://FamilyMatters.net).