



**Garrison, Gary. (2018). Raising Grandkids: Inside Skipped-Generation Families.  
Regina: University of Regina Press.**

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Gary Garrison's book, "Raising Grandkids", is a compelling narrative that illustrates the complicated journey of raising one's grandchildren in the absence of their parents. This journey is one of joy, sorrow, and hope. Through various personal narratives, Garrison eloquently discusses challenging topics, such as raising a skipped-generation FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder) child, Indigenous grandparenting, foster care, and much more. In these personal narratives, Garrison highlights two important themes, one of unconditional love and sacrifice, and the other of discrimination which permeates in the policies made by the welfare system. The author highlights how grandparents in skipped-generation families have chosen to postpone their retirement, and how they stretch their resources for the sake of their grandchildren; this is a common element that ties all the narratives together. He uses his personal experiences to form connections with other grandparents who are going through the same arduous journey. Garrison masterfully articulates each chapter by discussing the various challenges and fulfillments of raising one's grandchildren.

The author highlights an important difference between occasional grandparenting and full-time grandparenting. Occasional grandparenting is common within contemporary society, this includes taking a temporary break from retirement and spoiling the grandkids with presents and

treats, it does not involve disciplining the grandchild because that is the parent's duty (p. 15). However, for grandparents who have taken a parental role, it is a full-time job. As grandparents step into this role, they make lasting sacrifices. They raise their grandkids as they would their own children, "despite the anxiety, shame, guilt, expense, and frustrated dreams of retirement, [they] still love them" (p. 16). These grandparents experience a lack of belonging in their social life, they are unable to socialize with their retired friends because they are too busy parenting, and they are unable to fit in with other parents due to age gaps and generational differences (p. 16). Through these comparisons, Garrison elucidates the isolating nature of raising grandchildren. However, regardless of the loneliness, Garrison reiterates that he and other grandparents would choose to do it all over again.

The child welfare system is seen as one of the biggest hurdles in some of the narratives discussed in this book. The welfare system is depicted as broken because it holds onto impassive and discriminatory policies. In multiple accounts, the welfare system blocked the grandparent's appeal to adopt their grandchild (p. 39). Instead of providing support to the parent who is clearly struggling with drug-use, child-welfare reprimands them by preventing the parent from seeing their child for lengthy periods, this also destroys any semblance of a relationship that the grandparent can have with their own child. In the aftermath of these situations, grandparents are forced to step in and make arrangements that would be best suited for their grandchild, this often creates emotional and financial burdens in their already complicated lives. In many cases, the system provides little to no financial support for the grandparents.

Garrison highlights an even greater struggle faced by Indigenous grandparents. Welfare

systems, such as Children's Aid have a history rooted in racist and discriminatory policies (p. 106). The appeals made by Indigenous grandparents are hindered to a greater extent when compared to non-Indigenous grandparents. In one case, an appeal was denied because the Indigenous grandparents were "too old" to foster (p. 106). Garrison links these policies as a continued form of discrimination stemming from the residential school systems. He draws attention to the intergenerational trauma faced by Aboriginal communities. When children were taken from their parents, they were abused, forced to live in appalling conditions, and neglected. Therefore, "for generations afterwards, whole communities were rife with drugs, alcohol, addictions, poverty, violence, and self-loathing" (p. 104). This created an unending cycle of trauma; ultimately Indigenous grandparents were forced to step in and foster Indigenous children. Since the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) was established in 2008, new policies were implemented which ensured that welfare systems would place Indigenous children in homes that taught Indigenous cultural values and heritage (p. 105). Sadly, Garrison reports that "once [Aboriginal children are placed] in the system, you lose them forever", because they are consistently racialized, either directly or indirectly (p. 110).

When a woman consumes alcohol during pregnancy, it can cause permanent damage to the child's brain, this is known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) (p. 153). FASD is a common occurrence in many skipped-generation families. The author explains the flaws associated with the healthcare system in Canada. These systems are hesitant in diagnosing children with FASD because the costs associated with the diagnosis are high. Raising a child with FASD is extremely challenging, "it tests and stretches the limits of what any grandparent can do" (p. 154).

Despite this, Garrison talks about many instances in which grandparents have made the decision to not only take in one, but two grandchildren with FASD. These grandparents experience severe burn out, their lives revolve around their grandchildren who have no control over their emotional and physical outbursts. The author recounts one fatigued grandfather's ordeal; "Why am I trying to raise two damaged kids? I'm sixty-six years old. How long before I get to retire like a normal person and do something I really want to do?" (p. 173). Through this particular narrative, Garrison shines a light on the predicament these grandparents are placed in when it comes to raising their grandchildren. However, despite the emotional, physical, and financial strains, these grandparents would choose to do this task everyday, simply because of the love they hold for their grandchildren.

Garrison concludes his book by revisiting the theme of love, sacrifice, and how welfare systems can do better. He states:

Whether science can prove it or not, all of us skipped-generation grandparents know we're doing vital work. Our species may not be at risk of extinction, but we are each doing our part to ensure the survival and success of our grandkids. My hope is that everyone who reads this book will understand how much skipped-generation grandparents contribute to the health and future of our work. Maybe listening to someone's story is enough. Maybe you can improve government policy or correct a flaw in the child welfare system. I hope that since you've read this far, you know now that for those of us raising grandchildren, there really is nothing better for us to do (p. 207).

Garrison wrote this book to emphasize an overlooked aspect of child welfare; skipped-generation families. His work is abundant with innumerable personal narratives from grandparents who are raising their grandchildren by forgoing their retirement plans and other personal

gratifications. Prevailing themes within the book were one of unconditional love, sacrifice, and sorrow. In all of the accounts, the grandparents expressed sorrow at the loss of their child to drugs and alcohol. However, despite the sorrow and weariness, they made the decision to raise their grandchildren with love and compassion. This book caters to multi-disciplinary audiences, such as social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, legal professionals, and even health-care professionals. The narratives within this book may serve to raise awareness about the discriminatory policies associated with the welfare system, the importance of FASD diagnosis, and how more resources can be implemented for grandparents who are experiencing burn out due to financial and emotional hardships. I believe that this book was eloquently written, the author's own experience with his grandchildren undoubtedly helped him form a connection with the circumstances many skipped-generation families are facing. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in learning about fostering, adoption, familial relationships and much more.