



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

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Gary Garrison's book, "Raising Grandkids: Inside Skipped-Generation Families," tells the harrowing stories of grandparents raising their grandchildren while simultaneously dealing with the loss or disappearance of their own children. Garrison provides the reader with many interviews from other grandparents and great grandparents whose stories often do not differ too far from his own. Many of the grandchildren referenced in this book struggle with disabilities, mental or physical, that are largely a direct or indirect result of the biological mother of the child abusing substances while pregnant. Garrison offers a unique and fresh perspective on these grandparents' struggles and brings the form of the skipped-generation family into the forefront. The author brings to light the faults and failures of the systems put in place by the government that are designed, in theory, to keep these children safe. The author writes this book with a mild postmodern view of the family, which enables him to view the meaning of family as a changing and fluid term. It is expressed early in the book that these grandparents raise their grandchildren "while [they] nurse a wound deep in [their] hearts, because [their] child is out of the picture, because [they] fear for [their] child's safety, because when the telephone rings [they] shudder..." (pp. 3-4). The book describes the challenges grandparents face in raising their grandchildren, as well as how these challenges differ from those of foster parents, and Indigenous parents/grandparents.

Garrison is able to keep an unbiased view on the subject while describing the day-to-day life of skipped-generation families, a subject that is evidently close to his heart. He describes the battles between the grandparents and the systems of government that they are left to navigate, as well as the battles between the biological parents and the grandparents. Grandparents who seek out to raise their grandchildren often have to pay mountains of legal fees and jump through multiple hoops in order to give their grandchildren the benefit of being raised in a loving and caring home with members from their biological family. They have to go to court frequently in order to prove they are capable of raising the child or children, while the parents who are often drug addicts or alcoholics rarely have to go to such extreme measures to prove the same thing. Grandparents are often told they are too old to be able to raise a child, by social workers, judges, and family members. After the grandparent is awarded custody of their grandchild, they often undergo the judgement of friends and family who don't understand why the grandparent would want to raise a child instead of living the retirement life they have worked for. Garrison views the extra years that grandparents possess as an advantage, as their advanced years provide “the wisdom of lived experience, the family connection to the child, the love for the child they’ve had since she was born” (p. xv).

Garrison often speaks of the CANGRAND camp he attended and the type of *gemeinschaft* community it is able to provide for the grandparents, who all share similar struggles and values. CANGRAND is a place where “everybody [seems] to share intimate details of their family struggles with everybody else.” (p. 18). A recurring theme throughout this book is the support groups like CANGRAND and TAG that help grandparents learn new tips and techniques in order to successfully raise their new children, as well as providing them a place to vent and decompress.

These support groups are very important to the families that participate, as they provide a safe space for everyone to complain, commiserate, laugh, and let out their anger and frustrations with the situation they are in. The grandparents who are referenced in this book were able to create their own social safety nets by attending events like CANGRAND, TAG, and local support groups. Garrison often states his frustrations with the lack of support groups like these for grandparents, however he also admits that “grandparents who are busy raising little children usually don't have time to go to meetings, even if those groups offer exactly the kind of self-care they need.” (p. 72).

Garrison is able to delve deep into the brain structure of these neglected and abandoned children, and speaks to many professionals in an attempt to learn more about disorders like shell shock and FASD that affect many of the children mentioned in his book. The author is able to understand and describe the anger and frustrations that come along with FASD, for the child and the caregivers. Garrison aims to educate the readers as to the brain damage these children endured from their traumatic experiences. He conveys how the trauma of abandonment changes the child's brain on the molecular level, and then goes further into describing how meticulous and patient one has to be in repairing this damage. He describes the contrasting lives of two fictional children, Suzy and Jeremy, and educates the audience on what would happen if these two switched homes. He states that Jeremy, like many other abused and/or neglected children, learned a set of ‘rugby rules’ which aided him in dealing with his suboptimal living situation. The term ‘rugby rules’ refers to the rules the child learns to live by in order to survive, which differs from the ‘soccer rules’ which references the typical rules children from a normative home live by. Grandparents have to learn new and diverse ways to raise these children with disabilities and brain damage, since they live by a set of ‘rugby rules’ rather than the normal ‘soccer rules’.

The author speaks on the subject of Indigenous elders raising their grandchildren, and how residential schools and other traumatic events have changed the traditions and mindset of Indigenous peoples as a whole. Garrison expresses that “In Indigenous cultures, “grandfather” and “grandmother” are fluid terms.” (p. 118), exhibiting the contrast between the views we have about grandparents versus the views they hold. In Indigenous cultures, it is common for the grandparents to raise many of their grandchildren, as well as many other children in the community who may not be blood related. One Indigenous grandparent expresses that “it’s enough that the children he takes in are Indigenous.” (p. 118). Garrison views the Indigenous peoples as spiritual and free, and sympathizes with them over the damage they endured on behalf of the government. Aside from the Indigenous, Garrison also examines other ways of parenting a child who is not biologically your own. He brings the reader into the world of foster care, and brings to light what it means to be a foster parent, beyond the definition.

The bond between a child and their grandparent(s) is one of the most unconditional and loving relationships a child will have. When a parent is unable to raise their child, and a grandparent steps up to the challenge, that relationship is tested. This book is written to expose the legal, medical, economical, and mental challenges that come along with skipped-generation families. Disciplines that may benefit from studying this book could include social services, anthropology, psychology, education, philosophy, and many others. This book is also written for an audience of grandparents, and other types of caregivers raising children who are not their own, for those who are clueless to the sacrifices these parents make in order to give their new children the childhood they deserve. Garrison’s unique perspective of skipped-generation families compels the audience to feel a strong sense of sympathy and compassion for these families, which keeps

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the reader engaged throughout the whole book.