

## SPRING 2022

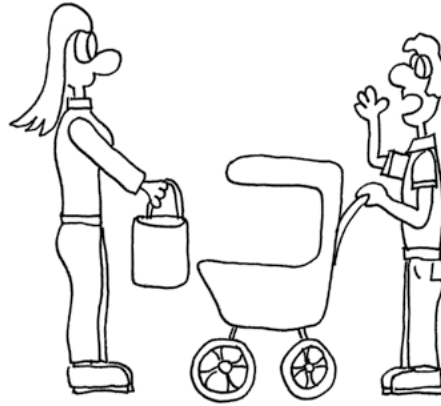
# Cleo

*Written by Doug Breen, Superintendent,  
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My Dad always said that being a grandparent was far better than being a parent. He explained that when he was raising my two brothers and I, his greatest fear was that one of us would grow up to be “useless.” He told us this on a regular basis! He never really worried about our feelings, self-esteem, self-actualization, or anything like that – because such things hadn’t been invented yet. Any child of Generation X can tell you, that feelings didn’t even exist until around 1970, and that children weren’t allowed to have them until the 1980’s. We were raised by parents who just never wanted one of us to be a burden on society, or to embarrass the family name. And to be fair – most of my generation (certainly the Breen boys) have been a net positive gain to their communities – even if we are a tad emotionally stunted.

But when it came to his grandchildren, my Dad didn’t care about any of those things. In fact, there were days when I suspected that he was actually working against me and trying to make them useless. I clearly remember one Saturday morning when my son asked if they could have chocolate milkshakes for breakfast, and he said, “Yes.” That’s the whole story! I thought, “Who is this guy, and what did you do with the man who would make us clean out calf pens in the barn if we showed enough poor judgment to stay home sick from school?”

We were allowed – no, encouraged – to ride in the back of pickup trucks, or the back window of a sedan. My mom once packed a whole baseball team (18 of us) into a station wagon that never had a seatbelt in it. However, she wouldn’t take her grandchildren to the corner and back without a properly fitted, federally approved car seat. My kids were given wet wipes, hand sanitizer, and water bottles with their names on them – I got the ‘spit on a Kleenex’ and



**I’m not going to try to teach her anything. My only commitment is to return her to you in roughly the same condition that I received her.**

drank from a communal garden hose.

So, Krista and I (along with the rest of our generation), tried to strike a balance between what would now be seen as parental neglect, and secretly not wanting the fruit of our loins to grow up to be useless either. Time will tell whether we were successful on the useless part, but I can assure you my children and their friends, are quite emotionally intelligent and have the self-confidence of a psychopath.

Well - now I’m a Grandfather.

Seems like just yesterday that I was having kids of my own, and now one of my kids had a kid. My Granddaughter (Cleo) is conveniently located in beautiful Burnaby British Columbia, which is really undermining my ability to make her useless. Because it turns out that everything my father said was exactly right! I worried about my kids becoming well-rounded, functioning members of society; but I just want to take Cleo to Disneyworld and have chocolate milkshakes at every meal. And if all that chocolate makes her sick, or she gets over tired, or anything else negative, I’ll hand her back to her parents and go play golf until she’s fun again.

My Dad’s behaviour is crystal clear to me now.

The role of Grandparent is infinitely better than the parental role. All the good stuff - with limited responsibility. Now I’m running around with a phone full of baby pictures (which I will force you to look at), and constantly planning what fun things we can do. I understand now, that my Dad wasn’t trying to make my kids useless – he just really didn’t feel any responsibility for it if they were.

Last, when your kids are small, you have no money, and you have no time. When you’re a grandfather, you have a lot more of both, and I intend to use those assets to ensure that I have the most spoiled grandchild in Canada. Coupled with my newfound irresponsibility, there will be milkshakes for breakfast. ■

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