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Parenting: Take Two!
Joan Callander

You might be a parenting grandparent...if

- * You have a refrigerator covered with kid art and spelling lists.
- * There are animal cookies and Metamucil in your shopping cart.
- * Your change goes for school lunches not Caribbean cruises.
- * You start giving Girl Scout cookies for hostess gifts.
- * Christmas is fun again.
- * Little cars on your white carpet, or spilled make-up in your bathroom, is the norm and no big deal.
- * You gave up Friday night Bingo for high school football games.
- * At garage sales you're buying the same baby paraphernalia and toys you sold 20 years ago.
- * You join AARP hoping for a hotel discount at Disneyland.
- * Pop Warner umpires hide when they see you coming.
- * You've quit making excuses for why mom/dad never show up when they are sober or expected or why God needed them with Him in heaven.
- * You answer to 'mom' or 'dad' and have to bite your tongue not to explain that you weren't the exception to kids after hysterectomies.

People laugh when I tell them I'm having a late mid-life crisis, but they aren't raising grandchildren. It's not about mini skirts and bare midriffs but about sitting on tiny, tiny school chairs for parent teacher conferences, renting only "PG" rated videos and spending my IRA on lawyers.

It's about being a tiger scout mom along with two twenty-something-year-old dads, a "thirtyish" one and another father who barely broke forty. At fifty, I was emphatically done with camping. Now four years later, I've signed up for a week this summer as a church camp counselor and a 3-day, 2-night overnighter with the scouts.

It's about asking my new husband of six months (yep there IS hope for us all) to trade in the corvette he'd waited 35 years to buy on a used sports utility vehicle. We need room for hockey gear, mounds of groceries and birthday party guests in route to swim parties.

My grandson is nine and I'm trying to 'get a grip' but my world keeps lipping. It took me about five years to really stop feeling sorry for myself and joyfully move forward. My

old dreams have been shattered and God is taking me places that are probably better for my heart and soul and varicose veined body.

I keep dying my hair so I look as much like other "moms" as possible for a kid whose gone from calling me 'grandma' to 'mom' and whom I'm trying to adopt. I'm letting my hair get a little longer and wear jeans a little more often. I can't eat pizza because of a gall bladder surgery...but I can guzzle water, nibble on salad and clap my way through basketball trophy awards.

I'm blessed with hearing prayers that end in "love and kisses" rather than "amen." I have someone who calls me the "wicked step mom" with an impish grin when I've run out of patience with his 'forgetting' his chores. I met people from all over the country that I would never have known who are walking similar paths holding little hands who desperately need someone stable and loving in their lives.

I wrote my book *Second Time Around* because I'd just taken an early retirement and a week later was a full time single mom with a preschooler who had to be in bed by 7:30. I've started a web-site www.grandparentsandmore.com when I never used to be able to log onto the Internet. I write a grandparent column for a local newspaper because I felt isolated and alone.

Somewhere in the process of raising my grandchild...I've grown. Is it easy to raise grandkids? No. Would I rather be a grandmother than a second time around mom? Yep. Is it going to happen? No. Do have advice for those trying to decide? Yes. Follow your heart...it's a life-changing journey.

We're a growing club...over one in ten grandparents raise grandchildren for six months or longer. If you're lucky enough to be one of the other 'nine' then hold out your hand to a friend or relative who is struggling. Offer to baby-sit, take their grandchild out and buy them new shoes or go fishing.

If you're the one in ten, accept it and get on with living. A crisis always passes and we're stronger, less judgmental and a lot more grateful when we finally settle down into whatever "normal" becomes. So when you see an old lady running down the block holding up the bicycle or trying to quiet a child in the restaurant--give her a smile--not a piece of your mind. If she smiles back...it's me. If she hits you with her umbrella...apologize and try again.