

A grand experience

Making time for kids is key to joy of grandparenting

13912 By DeeDee Winterson
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It may sound cliché but parents love to hear it from their own parents – “there is no better joy than being a grandparent.” But where does that joy come from, and how do you get it?

Life-long Cohasset resident Anna Abbruzzese claims that the joyous feeling comes from spending time with her eight grandchildren who range in age from 10 to 22. “Just to have them around with all that energy,” she said.

But it goes deeper than that; for some the boundless energy of a child can be exhausting. But for Abbruzzese, 72, it’s finding common ground. “Feeding them,” she boldly said. “Cooking is my favorite thing to do and eating is their favorite thing to do.” And with that they have developed traditions, such as family meals, where all 22 family members sit at one table rigged up by Abbruzzese, “at the request of my 10-year-old grandson,” she proudly said.

She said the main part of being a grandparent is taking the time to do so. For her that has meant going to her grandchildren’s various sporting events. “At the wrestling matches, I boast the biggest chest,” she said. “I am so proud.” All of her grandchildren play sports, and she tries to go to all of their events. “It’s a nice feeling to be a grandparent and to have them give you a hug, in the house or on the football field.”

She has built a true family connection, and has worked to establish family values that go beyond the 22 family member dinner table. Abbruzzese teaches a cooking class at the Cohasset senior center for 15 seniors, and is a member of the Board for the Cohasset Council of Aging (COA). “All of the kids volunteer at the center with me. All the kids have been real good,” she said. “And it has dribbled down to what they do in their schools and towns. Helping others is contagious... It fills you with pride.”

Abbruzzese has been able to bring her grandchildren into her life as a cooking teacher and volunteer at the senior center. For others it may be sharing a little of their spirit of adventure with their grandchildren.

Both Maureen Goodwin, of Brewster, and Marilyn Downes, of Plymouth, are what some might call your hot-riding grandmas. Although they may prefer to travel on the back of a motorcycle, their desire for adventure rises to the front. For Downes, 54, she likes to “watch the world go by.”

“I like the speed and the wind in my face,” said Downes, an administrative secretary and faculty advisor for the yearbook at Marshfield High School. “You can see and smell things that you miss when you’re in a car.”

Downes’ oldest grandchild, Nicholas, 4, shares her sense of adventure. Although too young for a motorcycle, he now sports his black and gold hel-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAM GRIGNAFFINI

Pam Grignaffini, 64, enjoys taking her grandchildren on an annual hike in the White Mountains.

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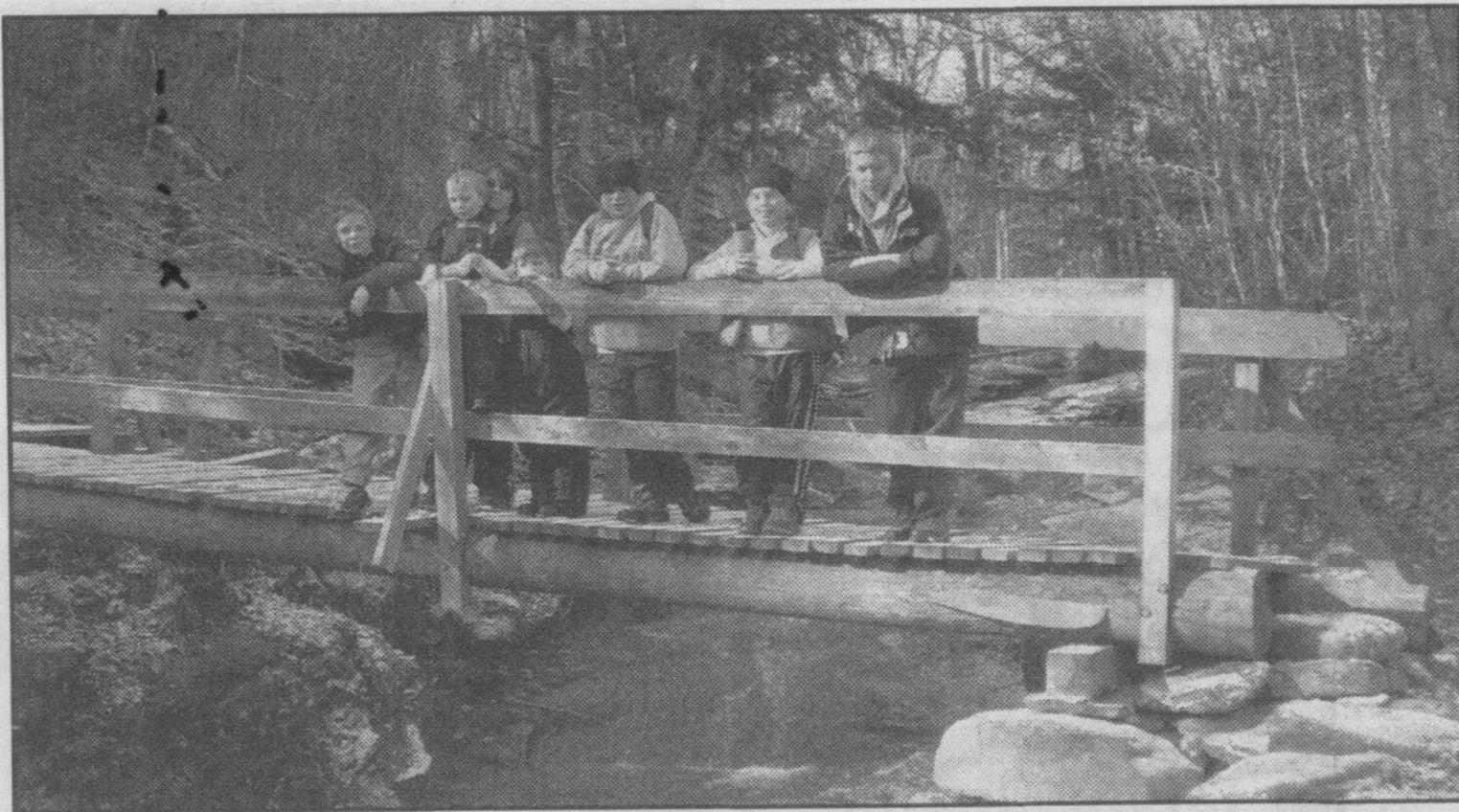
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met along with matching bike, "complete with matching pads," added Downes. And he never takes her motorcycle helmet off when he's at her home.

When they have slower times, they are spent doing puzzles, with Downes, her grandson and his younger sister, or at Stephens field. "They love the park," she said.

Goodwin's grandchildren are equally in awe of their grandmother and her motorcycle. "They love it," she said. Goodwin buys them T-shirts when she and her husband travel on "biker weekends" and much like Downes' grandson and his helmet; Goodwin's grandchildren wear their shirts with motorcycle pride. "They love them and won't take them off," she said, admitting that her son has gotten used to the idea that he no longer is on the receiving end of these token gifts.

Although the kids are too young to ride with her on the bike, MacKenna is 5 and Griffin is only 3, Goodwin said they have a second love — snowmobiles. "The little one (Griffin) at first thought it was a helicopter when he saw it, because of the long skis," she said with a laugh.

Their first tour around their camp in Vermont was at a whopping 5 miles per hour, due to a big snowstorm, "but that was perfect," said Goodwin. "We would come in and get dry and warm, and then



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAM GRIGNAFFINI

Pam Grignaffini's grandchildren and friends enjoy the time spent together hiking with her in the White Mountains.

they would want to go right back out again."

Friendships blossom

For grandchildren, it can be time spent as a family or doing one-on-one projects. It is just great to know you have grandparents you can count on. "My kids love their grandparents, they are teens with grandparents in their 80s," said Sue Rameaka of Plymouth. "They love for them to come over and play video games. Simple ones

— like bowling and golfing on Nintendo II."

Kelsey, 16, and Adam, 18, are also looking forward to going on a cruise with their grandparents, Ruth and Richard Ross, 80 and 81 respectively, of Brewster. According to their mom, Kelsey and Grandma are going on a girls shopping spree to update her grandmother's wardrobe. "Kelsey wants to turn my mom into a diva, and my mom thinks she's a hoot," Rameaka said. "They just have a great relationship — a good friendship."

Rameaka enjoys watching the relationship between her children and parents blossom. "They brag how funny it is to have older grandparents. They love to joke about generation differences. It's all in fun and my parents love it," she said. By bridging this age gap and making the connection, she believes her parents are able to stay healthier, livelier. "I feel like it's keeping my parents younger," she explained.

If young and healthy is where you want to be, you can take some tips from one grandmother who just seems to be getting stronger and healthier with age. Pam Grignaffini, 64, of Wellesley, has reached out through Girl Scouting and Heifer International to become a surrogate grandmother to many. Although she has eight grandchildren of her own in Plymouth, Natick and Wellesley, she also works with kids in Marshfield, Plymouth, Milton, Needham, Weston, her home town and other states (including Wisconsin and Seattle).

The one activity she enjoys most is hiking. Her children refer to her as a "pack mule." They explained that, "for the most part, she can carry more than any other hiker she hikes with; man, woman or child."

Grignaffini just recently got certified

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with the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) and this summer is looking forward to taking at least four of her grandchildren, ages 10 to 14, on a three-day hike in the White Mountains. This hike will be in addition to her family and friends annual fall hike that began as a 50th "over-the-hill" birthday party.

"Hiking is an opportunity for kids and adults to explore, bond and triumph," Grignaffini has said of her trips. "You have to learn to be patient and work together on the trail, and then wherever and however you are lodging." With her grandchildren this year, she plans to stay in one of the

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AMC huts. "When they are a bit older we will tent," she said enthusiastically.

In April she returned from a 10-day trip to Honduras. This is her fifth trip as a leader of a Study Tour group from Heifer International, a non-profit non-governmental organization of which Grignaffini has been a part of for the past 18 years

independently and through Girl Scouts. Her trip has included members from Marshfield High School and her grandson, from Plymouth South Middle School. For her, "opening up an opportunity for youth to see the world and realize that they can make a difference is what it's all about, as both, a grandparent as

well as a leader in a community."

Whether she is with her own grandchildren or a flock of children, you can hear the call, "hey nonna, hey nonna." Nonna is Italian for grandmother. "I've just become used to answering the call," jokes Grignaffini, "and kids just feel comfortable calling me nonna."

"It comes down to teaching family and community values," Grignaffini concluded. Like Abbruzzese, it's developing traditions, something you have in common with your grandchildren or the children in your neighborhood. And it's taking the time to do it. ♦