

Grandparenthood

When my first grandchild was born, I was younger than any of my grandparents were when I was born. How has the grandparent-grandchild relationship changed? My grandchildren live 300 miles away. In the past, this might have meant that I saw them rarely, if ever and unless I was comfortably literate, even the occasional letter would have been unlikely.

It is too soon to say what aspects of my appearance or personality will be reflected in my grandchildren but I can see echoes of my own grandparents in me. What then of these grandparents of mine, my grandchildren's great great grandparents? I was an only grandchild for all of them, unusual for the time. When I was born I had four living grandparents, although all had died by the time I was eleven years old. Even though I am fortunate to have a very good recollection of my childhood, this does mean that my memories of grandparently relationships are limited to the perspective of a young child.



My Maternal Grandmother Ivy Gertrude Smith née Woolgar and her daughter (my mother)

My mother's parents lived within walking distance and we saw them weekly. They were able to provide regular support for my mother. Equally she was on hand to help my grandmother when my grandfather was ill and then when she was widowed. When my grandmother herself became unwell she came to live with us.

'Granny', Ivy Gertrude Woolgar, was 63 when I was born and died a month after my seventh birthday. She was a wonderful lady and the archetypal granny in everything except build. We played together regularly, she taught me to knit, recited nursery rhymes and did all the things grannies are meant to do. My first family holidays were on the Isle of Wight and Granny came too. My memories of Granny are a role model

for my own grandparenting. Although I lack her dainty size, physically I have inherited most from this grandparent. In fact I wonder why, when I look in the mirror, she looks back.

My maternal grandfather and youngest grandparent, was Frederick Herbert Smith; he was 61 when I was born and he died the following year. Despite this, I do remember sitting in the sunshine on his desk in the back bedroom that was his office. According to other relatives he was happiest with his own company. A Chartered Accountant by profession, his main hobbies were stamp collecting and train spotting. I suspect that, in today's world, a diagnosis on the autistic spectrum might have been applied. He did everything he could to avoid family gatherings but nonetheless played with me and taught me to count his keys. There were thirteen but somewhere someone must have suggested that thirteen was not to be mentioned so I always counted 'eleven, twelve, fourteen.' What



**My Maternal
Grandfather
Frederick Herbert
Smith**



**My Paternal
Grandfather Albany
Braund**

then has come to me from this grandparent? Physically, my short-sightedness but some aspects of my personality, such as the attention to detail and my self-sufficiency are his too. I wish I could have had the chance to get to know him better; I think we would have got on rather well.

My paternal grandparents were much more aloof. We visited, perhaps monthly and occasionally went to Battersea Park, together with my parents. I was certainly never alone with them and have no recollection of anything that could constitute play. Albany Braund, 'Grandpops', a railway porter, became a grandparent at the age

of 67 and died when I was six. He was also the only one of my grandparents to grow up in the countryside and I now live closest to his birthplace. I was always a little wary of his gruff manner. Although I didn't realise it at the time it is likely that my maverick tendencies and my willingness to challenge authority come from this grandparent.

My fourth grandparent, 'Grandmums' Elizabeth Ann Hogg, was 69 when I was born, the eldest of my grandparents, yet she lived the longest, dying when I was ten. My relationship with her was a distant one and memories are shaped by her diabetes. We always had to shop for PLJ for her to drink and diabetic chocolate, neither of which were easy to obtain. I can't identify how Elizabeth Ann has contributed to my genetic mix. I clearly remember the journeys to their house and the house itself but the personalities of my paternal grandparents elude me. Perhaps that in itself suggests that they were not child

orientated. When one considers their background this is perhaps not surprising. Albany was only five when his widowed mother married again and left him to be brought up by his grandmother and then an older aunt, who had children of her own. He had contact with his three surviving grandparents, all of whom lived close by. In contrast, although three of Elizabeth Ann's grandparents lived until she was a young adult they lived many miles away in Northumberland and Buckinghamshire, whilst Elizabeth's parents had brought her up in London. Elizabeth's mother died when she was twelve and family stories relate that her Northumbrian grandmother came to look after her but I have no evidence of this.

Unusually for their generation, three of my grandparents grew up as only children, the exception was Ivy; this probably had an impact on their ability to form other family relationships, certainly Ivy was the most family orientated of the four.



**My Paternal
Grandmother
Elizabeth Ann Hogg**

What will come down to my grandchildren from all these ancestors and of course from their equally significant ancestors on their paternal line and the forebears of their maternal grandfather, whom I have not celebrated here? They will of course just grow up to be their own very special people but maybe sometimes echoes of their genetic forbears will travel down the generations and show themselves.