

Being a Grandparent from a Distance

Staying in touch with family is my priority. As an expatriate grandmother living in Bangkok I have found that staying connected with grandchildren is easier than ever before. Technology has made face to face contact possible, even though we are separated by distance and many time zones. There are many innovative ways to stay in touch. Historically, we were limited to sending telegrams with good or bad news or hand written postcards and letters that were sent from different places via “snail mail” between our infrequent visits home. Telephone calls were often prohibitively expensive. That was the best we could do before faxes and email.

Now with a computer and webcam we can use the technology to have video calls, and see each other face to face. I have a stack of my children’s favorite books by my computer. If I call in the evening their time, often I enjoyed reading our grandchildren bedtime stories, showing them the pictures as I read. For holidays- and for no reason - I send animated email cards with music and action. There are many choices out there, some are free and others charge a small annual fee. I subscribe to both Birthday Alarm.com and to Jacquie Lawson.com for animated e-cards. Another site I like is Monk-e-mail.com (under career builders.com) where I can dress a chimp and record my own voice message. My grandchildren love this!

Small children are learning at a young age how use the internet. There are educational games that teach them how to read, count and spell. I have often said “*our children are our teachers*” and now I can safely say, so are our grandchildren. In order to communicate, we need to stay abreast with their interests and the ways they communicate. It is never too late to learn something new and if we want a relationship with our grandchildren this is one way to do it.

The gift of being a grandparent is the wonderful discovery that our role is to practice giving unconditional love to our grandchildren. Unlike our own children we can let go of expectations and our aspirations for them. Instead we can let them draw us into their fantasies. They can help us slow down to appreciate the little things in life, like a walk in the park, finding a buttercup, or daisies in the grass, or going to the zoo and seeing a sea lion face to face through the glass. They can remind us that time is precious and encourage us to find ways to make memories in our lifetime and theirs.

As an expatriate family, we especially enjoyed visits with our parents on our own foreign turf. When our children were small they would come to visit for a few weeks at a time and then when we were on home leave, we would stay with them in their homes. The advantage was that our children had top quality time with their grandparents and treasured memories of our family adventures together. Our grandchildren are small and for now we will be the ones who visit them. However, I look forward to the day when they will come to Thailand and we will be able to share with them the wonder and delight of living in this amazing country.