

Parent Connection

When it comes to contentment we have a lot to learn from seniors

As I was growing up in a rural community, spending time with grandparents was a greater blessing than I then realized. Warm memories of quality times give me a sense that much of who I am today was influenced by these dear seniors.

I grew up in a different culture than my own two daughters. Perhaps a simpler lifestyle was the order of the day. My grandparents and their peers, though facing many problems of their own, had one thing in common. They were content with life.

Contentment doesn't always mean one is happy 24/7. It does mean that folks who are content are satisfied with who they are, what they have, and are not always wanting something more. They are, for the most part, simply satisfied.

Have things really changed? According to today's senior citizens, perhaps not. I eagerly read "The oldest Americans are also the happiest, research finds" (Associated Press), in the April 19 edition of The Gazette. It appears that our seniors are happier with life than us younger folks, and according to study author Yang Yang, University of Chicago sociologist, "older people generally have learned to be more content with what they have than younger adults."

What they have. Perhaps this is a key for this, a parenting column. In a culture that promotes social competition, the accumulation of more stuff, and our kids wanting more privilege long before they are ready for it? Well, there you are. Do we really expect our kids to be content with life?

First, let's look at social competition. Back to the AP article, aging expert Linda George of Duke University states that "older people have learned to lower their expectations and accept their achievements...it's fine that I was a school teacher and not a Nobel prize winner."

Hmm. A far cry from every other parent pushing for their child to be the next Tiger Woods or Mia Hamm. And these seniors didn't have to be the queen bee of the hive to be content.

Then there is the accumulation of stuff. Our kids are beginning to tell us that more video games, gadgets, expensive toys, and the hottest clothes aren't making them happier. More stuff in order to "fit in" isn't satisfying. No matter how much stuff you get, there are others out there with more.

Finally, there's the issue of more privilege at earlier ages. Perhaps what our younger kids and 'tweens need isn't more license to go out and do whatever - but quality time with friends that is supervised by parents without apology.

A separate University of Chicago study cited in the article found that "about 75 percent of people aged 57 to 85 engage in one or more social activities at least every week."

Parents promoting and supervising get-togethers won't replace messaging and texting friends. Techie talk is our present day. It will, however, provide some quality face-to-face socializing. Parents need to get over the stigma that there's something wrong with supervised social events with their kids and 'tweens.

I was blessed by having dear grandparents who were content with life. Perhaps we all can learn from our seniors of today.

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Courtesy: http://www.gastongazette.com/articles/content_19607_article.html/kids_stuff.html

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