

Writing For My Grandchildren?

I was surprised to see my grandchildren crop up in some of the comments I received from those who read my first manuscript, Easy Essays. No, not their names, mind you, just a generic reference along with a comment like, what a wonderful gift for your grandchildren. Or, your grandchildren will be pleased to read these stories some day. I wonder if these readers might have assumed I wrote these essays for my grandchildren, or if they were meant to instruct them.

If these comments turn out to be accurate, it will be a pleasant surprise, believe me. It may be an isolated example of positive unintended consequences, contrary to my usual experience, wherein unintended consequences usually rain coals of fire down on my head. Truthfully, I wrote these essays for myself, and then for anyone else who takes the time, and the trouble, to read them. Of course, I hope some of the grandchildren read my essays when they're age appropriate - this is a turn-of-the-century term used by one's children to rationalize to their parents the unruly behavior of their own children - but what if they don't? Would I be disappointed? I hope not.

The idea that my grandchildren might someday be pleased to read these essays set me thinking. How many grandchildren do you know who have had the opportunity to read true stories about their grandparents? Or their great-grandparents? Not to get ridiculous, but what about stories relating to their great-great-grandparents? Perhaps I am not typical, but I never read a single word about my grandparents, and I have absolutely no idea who my great's were, let alone read anything about them. Yes, I lived close enough to my grandparents to get to know them a little, but most of my cousins, who were much younger, or who lived afar, did not.

I suspect the distance between grandchildren and grandparents is even more distant in modern times. Later marriages, later childbearing, and married adult children living far from home create a grandparent chasm rarely bridged, it seems to me. There is some offset because seniors now live longer, but that also means many grandparents are well into old age before the infant grandchild comes on the scene. Bonnie and I have met many grandparent-age adults who have no foreseeable prospects for having grandchildren, let alone getting to know them well.

But let me not overstate the case, either. As of this writing, I have nine grandchildren, ages nine to two, most of whom live away. I have met them all, I know their names, I have some inkling about their personalities and talents, and I have helped on a few occasions to baby sit them, but this is a far cry from saying I know them, or that I am involved with their upbringing. My essays are not going to bridge this gap, all they will accomplish for these grandchildren is to tell a few true stories, provide some historical setting and cultural mores, and hopefully, give some insight about their ancestors. If only half of that is accomplished, they will be well served, I think.

No, I cannot truthfully say I have written these essays for my grandchildren, but if they are still reading, I ask them to write their own sets of essays, so that their grandchildren will in effect have stories that reach back a hundred years, or more. That, dear grandchildren, would really be something to write about.