

Granny Always Said

Traditional Parenting Tips for Today's Parents

Grant Charles, Hali McLennan, & Thom Garfat



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Introduction



There are a lot of books out there on parenting. Some of them very good, some not so good. However, regardless of their content they all seem to have one thing in common. They're just too complicated. They talk (not that books can talk) in great detail about what you should do and shouldn't do. "Great parents do this, bad parents do that. If you don't do this or that by a certain age your kid won't grow up to be a perfect adult". This stuff can get quite scary and gosh, most of the advice in these books is darn near impossible to do on a consistent basis. There's nothing wrong with the advice but a lot of it just seems to make parents feel bad or inadequate about themselves.

This isn't the way it's supposed to be. Parenting just isn't as complicated as these books make it out to be. In fact, it's pretty straightforward for most of us. There's stuff you have to do, some stuff you shouldn't do and some stuff you have to learn to do but nothing that most of us won't learn to do just fine. It's

not rocket science. For the most part it's just good old common sense.

We don't need a pile of long-winded books to help us be good parents. All we need as parents is some straight-forward support and some good old-fashioned advice. Not from books that give you a headache as you try to figure out exactly how to do in real life what they are suggesting. Instead we need the kind of knowledge that our grandparents knew so well. They didn't learn what they needed from books full of new space-aged theory. They learned about parenting from doing it and living it. They had a lot they could teach us.

Granny Casey knew how to parent. It's easy to conjure up an image of the ideal grandmother. Quiet, soft spoken, grey haired, gentle. Plates of cookies, bowls of candies. A loving touch. A great mental image.

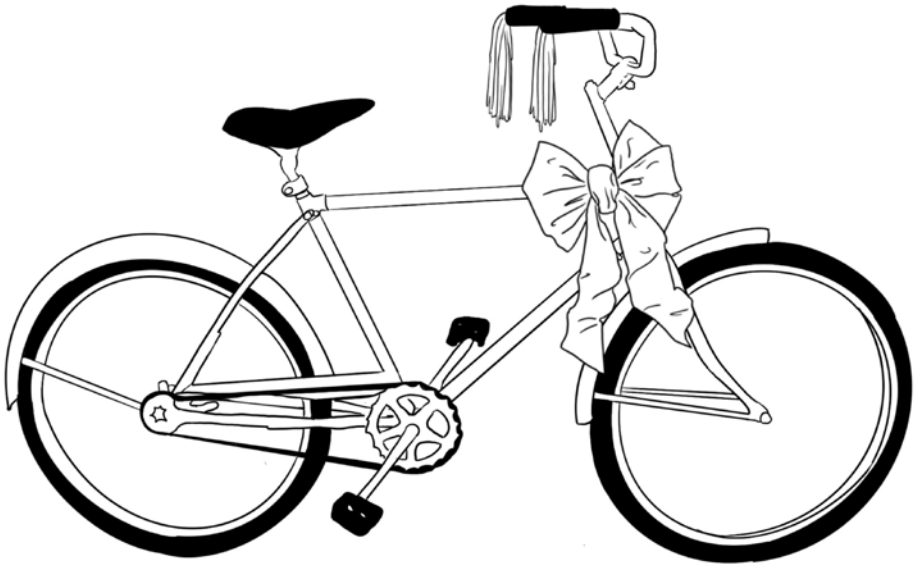
Well, Granny Casey wasn't anything like that. She was a hard fisted, loud, driven woman. She lived in hard times, raised her kids after the war when times were still tough. She had to fight for survival. She didn't know the meaning of gentle. She made mistakes and accepted them because she knew that was part of being a parent and a person.

Granny Casey was Irish. Least ways as Irish as anyone could be if they had an Irish name but came from the stock of all sorts of different people. You see her family has been here for many years so no one knew what they were. She was so short that she wasn't even five-foot-tall in her dreams. She was a good parent. No hands-off parenting for her. She was an in your face type of parent so rarely seen today. She was clear on what good parenting was. No pampering or self-actualization for her kids. Her kids were raised to live in the world. They were raised to be

respectful, responsible and realistic. Granny had clear expectations of her children. She raised good kids.

Granny might not have always been right but she was right so often that when she wasn't it really didn't count. These are stories about our uncles and aunt when they were being raised by our grandmother during tough times in this country. What follows is advice Granny Casey either gave or would have given about parenting given half the chance.

Consequences



Granny Casey was a great believer in life teaching its own lessons. She saw parenting as using what happens in everyday life as a way of teaching her kids how to grow into responsible, contributing adults. There's a story about our Uncle John's bike that is a good example of how she put her beliefs into action.

Apparently when Uncle John was nine or ten Granny Casey got him a bicycle for his birthday. Now it wasn't a new bike. She couldn't afford one. It was a fixer upper and that's what she did. She didn't know the first thing about bikes so she went looking for help. She remembered hearing sometime back that Old Man

Johnson a couple of blocks over had once worked in a bike shop in his younger years. She asked him to teach her about bikes.

He was a good teacher. Old Man Johnson didn't fix it for her although he sure could have. Instead he told her and sometimes showed her what to do. She snuck over to his house a couple of times a week for the better part of three months to get the bike ready for Uncle John's birthday.

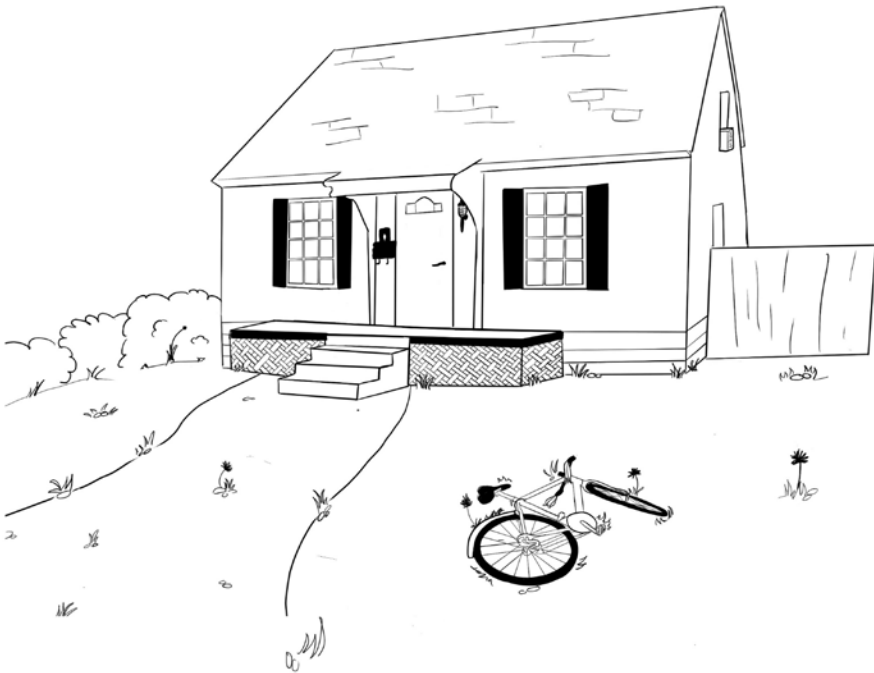
And get it ready she did. Uncle John woke up on his birthday to find the bike of his dreams standing there in the living room. Granny Casey had painted it blue. She had put on some fenders she had bought cheap at the junkyard. They didn't quite match but they were pretty close. The bike had streamers she made out of old cloth coming out of the handlebars. It was clean and everything worked. It was a great old bike that any kid would have been happy to own.

After breakfast she sat down with Uncle John and told him how to take good care of the bike. She showed him what Old Man Johnson had showed her. She warned him that he had to put the bike away every night in the shed so no one would take it. She told him, not for the first time, that it was important to take care of your things if you wanted to keep them.

Uncle John loved that bike. He rode it everywhere. He rode to school and to the playground. Sometimes he would just ride it round and round the block for hours at a time. There probably wasn't a kid in the world that loved a bike more.

He loved the bike but he didn't always take the best of care of it. He would often leave it in the front yard at night. Granny Casey, if she saw it out there would remind Uncle John to put it away. Granny Casey knew that kids that age can sometimes be forgetful, but even then, she never put it away for him.

One night he forgot to put the bike away. Granny Casey hadn't been to the front of the house before dark and so she hadn't noticed that he hadn't put it away. When Uncle John went out to the shed in the morning to get the bike it wasn't there. Then he remembered he had left it in the front yard. When he went to get it, the bike was gone. He looked everywhere for that bike. Granny Casey and the other kids helped him. They searched everywhere in the neighborhood. They searched for days but Uncle John never saw that bike again. They figured that someone, seeing it lying in the front yard, thought it was easy pickings and stole it.



Uncle John was crushed. He cried for days. It broke Granny Casey's heart to see him that way but she knew this was one of life's lessons. Many parents today would have gone out and replaced the bike for their kid but Granny Casey didn't do that. One, she couldn't afford it and two she thought it would have been wrong. She figured that if Uncle John was old enough to own a bike and ride it on the roads, he was old enough to face the consequences of not taking proper care of it.

Granny Casey was a great believer in natural consequences. She figured life was full of lessons for her kids. One of them was that everyone had to learn that you reaped what you sowed. She saw it as her job as a parent to help her kids learn from their actions or in this case their lack of actions.

No, she didn't buy Uncle John a new bike. Instead she talked to him about the importance of taking care of what was yours. She didn't nag him. Just had one conversation with him once he had mellowed out a bit about losing the bike. She knew there was no point talking to him until he was ready to listen.

She kept the talk simple. No speeches, no "I told you so". Just a straightforward conversation about doing what you have to do.

The talk lasted but a couple of minutes. And then she helped him work out how to get another bike.

They talked for quite a while about how he could earn the money to buy a new bike. They agreed he could earn saving money by helping the neighbors. He didn't get much of an allowance but they put together a plan where she would hold back a bit each week and save it for him. He really wanted another bike so he worked hard at saving money.

It took him almost a year to get the money together to buy another bike. It wasn't as nice as his birthday bike but Granny Casey taught him how to fix it up. He rode that bike forever and when he became a parent his kids rode it too. He still has that bike. It's not much to look at and can't hold a candle to today's bikes. It has been fixed so often that nearly the whole bike has been replaced more than once - but it's still the bike that he bought with his own money. He will probably keep that bike forever.

Uncle John learned a lot from having his bike stolen. He learned to take care of his things if you wanted to keep them. He learned how to save. He learned that with hard work and a little sacrifice you can achieve your goals. He learned the joy of earning your own way. All because Granny said to him that you had to accept the consequences of your actions. She always said that life teaches kids the best lessons if only parents knew enough to get out of the way of the learning.

Thunder and Frightening



Granny Casey's house was quite ordinary. Three bedrooms, a living room, a mud room by the back door. All the rooms were quite small. All the rooms that is except the kitchen. The kitchen was one of those rooms that was both large and cozy at the same time. In many ways the kitchen was a reflection of Granny. Practical, functional yet warm, nurturing and safe.

It was a typical kitchen of the times. A stove, a fridge, lots of cupboard space. Full of wonderful aromas. You could never quite put a name to the wonderful scents you smelled as soon as you entered the room. They seemed to have settled in every crack of the room. I guess it was the accumulation of years of home cooked meals. If you had been in the kitchen once you could forever bring back the memories of how you felt in the room.

There were always cookies available for the asking although most of the time you didn't have to ask because they were just sitting there for the taking. Even though there was never enough money Granny Casey always made sure the kids were well fed. Never anything fancy, just solid food. The type of food that nurtured the body and the soul.

Apart from the wonderful aromas and the seemingly endless supply of cookies the next thing you noticed was the table. It was huge. Not large like in the dining rooms of rich people but still huge. Too large for the room but still the kind of table that seemed to belong there. You know, the kind of table that seemed just large enough regardless of the number of people sitting around it. No one remembered how old it was but Granny got it from her mother who got it from her mother.

The table was solid. Solid even though you could see the years of wear on it. The surface was scratched and dented from thousands of meals. The legs were thick and the feet seemed to grow right out of the floor. The whole thing seemed irremovable. The table, like the kitchen had the feeling of stability and permanence about it. You somehow felt good just sitting at it.

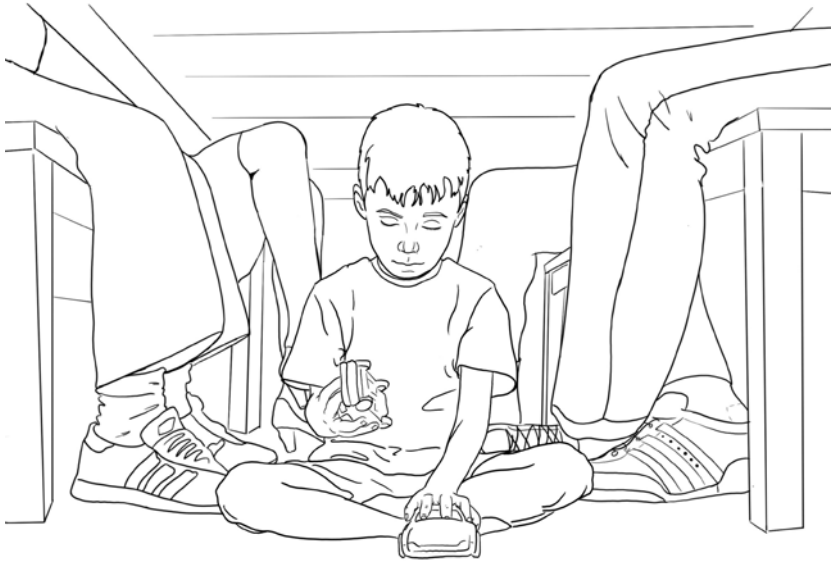
The sense of permanence and stability in the whole room was most noticeable in times of trouble. Now, we all define trouble differently. What's trouble to one person is nothing to the next. Troubles come in big and small. Granny Casey always said that each of us defined what troubles were by our own experiences. She knew that troubles were troubles no matter your age or size. She respected the troubles and fears of the kids around her. She had no time for adults that thought the fears and troubles of kids didn't mean anything just because they were kids.

This was most evident in the way she treated Uncle John when he was a kid about his thunder and frightening. This was what he called thunder and lightening storms. Uncle John was big for his age, still is as an old man. He was tough. He looked like the kind of kid who could take care of himself. The point is that he looked like the kind of kid who wasn't afraid of anything. That was what you would think if you saw him and you would almost be right. He wasn't afraid of much but he was afraid of thunderstorms. He was terrified of them.

No one knew why thunderstorms scared Uncle John so much. He was scared of them as a baby, still is as an adult. Still in another way it wasn't a surprise. Thunderstorms in this part of the country are something to be scared of. They come in the hottest days of the summer. You can feel them building up in the western skies long before you can see them. Course, Granny said you could tell even sooner than that by looking at Uncle John. He started to get kind of spooked early in the day. Somehow, he knew before anyone else that a storm was coming. He was more accurate than the weather people.

Anyhow these storms slowly build up in the west. The clouds gather on the horizon and then push up high into the sky

increasing in darkness until they are ready to explode. You can hear the storm rumbling in the distance. Everything gets very still until suddenly the wind picks up and the storm is upon you. Although you are expecting it, somehow the storm always surprises you. Not that it is there but the sudden violence of it. The storm seems to engulf you. The thunder rattles the windows and sometimes the walls. The lightening is everywhere. You know it going to pass as quickly as it came but for a moment that lasts forever you think that the storm will never leave.



Even before the storm hit Uncle John would have made his way to the kitchen. As the thunder would start to build, he would climb under the table. He felt safe there. He knew nothing could ever harm him if he was under the table in Granny's kitchen. It was just too safe and too solid. If the storm got really bad the rest of the family would also gather in the

kitchen. They would sit around the table and talk about whatever came up. Nothing in particular, just the kind of talk you have when Mother Nature reminds you of her power. Uncle John would take part in the talk. No one ever paid any mind to the fact that he was under the table. That was just accepted as the way Uncle John dealt with how he was feeling. It wasn't hurting anyone and wasn't hurting him. This went on for years until he stopped on his own - although even today during a really bad storm you can see him checking out the tables wherever he happens to be. He doesn't need to get under a table. He just needs to know a table is there if he ever needs one.

Granny said we all need our own tables to hide under when the going gets too tough, when the world sends a thunder and frightening storm at us. She said that when we are kids we need our own table. The table takes many forms and shapes but we always need one. As kids we need the table to be in one place. As adults we learn to take the table in our hearts. Granny always said we can only learn to take our tables in our hearts if the adults around us respect our troubles and fears when we are kids.

Ajax the Hero



Granny Casey was a collector. Not one of those people who tries to get all of the same things. You know, she didn't collect stamps or coins or stuff like that, although she did have a stamp and coins in her collection. She had a stamp that had been printed upside down and a couple of old

coins with English kings on them that were long since dead. Maybe you couldn't even actually call her a real collector because she didn't have a collection, but she did collect things. She collected things that other people throw away, things that other people didn't want. She always found a use for them. Even the stuff most of us would think was useless.

One of the oddest things she had in her collection was Ajax. Ajax was one of the ugliest dogs you ever saw. As Granny said many times: that was a dog that hit all the branches on the way down when he fell out of the ugly tree. He was a bulldog or at least a bulldog mutt. His legs were too long for his body or maybe his body was too short for his legs. He had hair so light that you could see the pinkness of his skin. That is except for the parts of him that were covered with awful patches of a yet unnamed color. Ajax had one blue eye and one pink eye both of which wandered all over, but never together. You never knew which way he was looking. Altogether he was one of the ugliest creatures ever to walk the face of the planet.

The strangest thing about him though wasn't the way he looked. The strangest thing about him was his tongue. It was purple. It was the strangest color for a dog's tongue but it wasn't the color you noticed. What you noticed when you first saw him (and every time after) was that his tongue was too big for his mouth. It was huge. It was always falling out of his mouth. No matter how hard he tried Ajax just couldn't keep that tongue in his mouth. He never seemed to have control of it. It was always falling out one side or another, or both sides of his mouth at once along with a consistent flow of drool. You could always tell if Ajax had been in a room recently by the pool of drool on the floor or the damp spots on the furniture.

Ajax tried hard to be friendly but mostly people just wanted to run away from him. Not that he was a mean dog, he wasn't. In fact, it would have been better if he was mean. At least then you would have a good excuse not to want to be near him, but damned if he wasn't friendly, which meant he would either knock you over as he fell into you when he first saw you, because he couldn't walk straight on account of his eyes, or he would cover you with drool. Usually he did both. Altogether he was an unpleasant animal to be around. Most of the neighbours couldn't understand why Granny Casey kept him. Most thought him ugly and useless. When asked why she hung onto to him she would always say "Just wait and you'll see he's got a use". No one believed her but everyone just waited because she said that was what everyone should do.

The only other animal in the house at the time was Dori, which was short for Exidor. Dori was an old momma cat that had wandered into the yard years before and never left. She was a mean sort of orange color. The kind of color nature uses to say danger. She was not a playful sort of cat. In fact, she barely tolerated people. She was the kind of cat that dogs would avoid. The few dogs that tried to tangle with her soon learned their lessons. It was common practice for dogs to cross the street before passing Granny Casey's house so as to stay out of the way of Dori. Dogs still avoid the front of the house even though Dori has been dead for years. Seems that dogs have passed a warning about the killer cat from generation to generation.

By the time Ajax came along Dori was getting on in years. For some reason she accepted the dog into the house with barely a fuss. Not that she got along with Ajax, more like that she tolerated him. Granny always figured that Dori didn't see Ajax as

any kind of threat because he was just too ugly and too uncoordinated. That was the other thing about Ajax. He was always tripping over his own feet or running into things.

According to the family Dori always seemed to be having kittens. No one ever figured out what male cat in his right mind would want to mate with her but the kittens came out of her regular as clockwork. The family gave them all away reckoning that the neighborhood couldn't handle more than one animal from her gene pool. Anyhow she was getting on in years and it turned out she only had one litter of kittens during the time Ajax was around.



This last litter almost killed her. She was sickly throughout the pregnancy and barely made it through the labor. Afterwards

she was never quite the same. She died shortly after weaning her babies. Funny thing was she probably wouldn't have even made it that far if it wasn't for Ajax. She was just too worn down to be able to take care of the kittens on her own. Anyhow a couple of days after the kittens were born Ajax just sort of took over most of the parenting. Dori would feed the young ones but most of the other time Ajax would be there to do the rest.

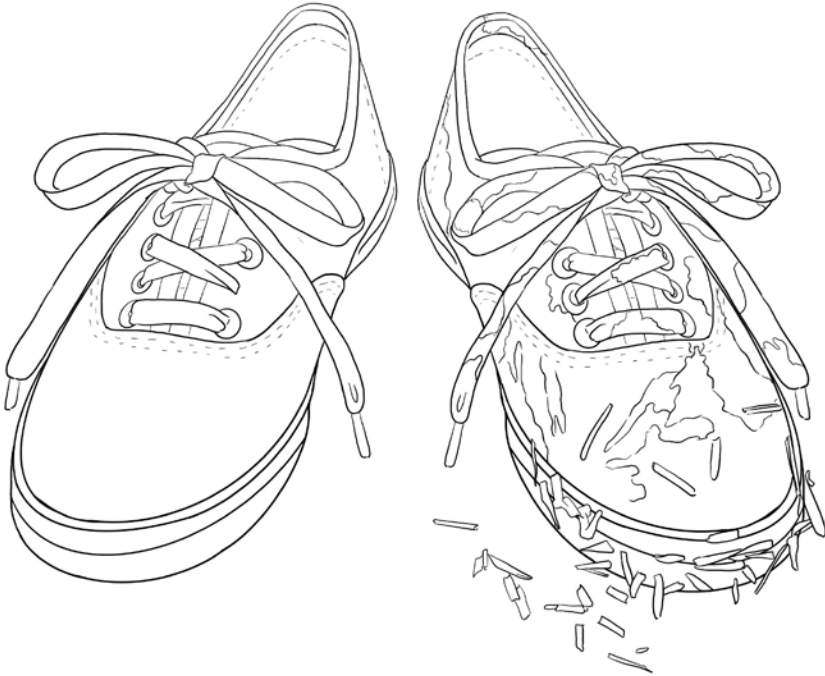
Somehow this ugly, seemingly good for nothing clumsy dog became an ideal parent. That oversized tongue of his washed the kittens until they learned to do it on their own. When Dori needed rest Ajax would gently pick up the kittens one by one and move them to the other end of the kitchen. Granny said it was the funniest thing to see that old boxer lying on the floor with six kittens sleeping up against his belly. He would play with them and herd them and care for them. He was still the clumsiest dog in the world except around them. Somehow around them he became the dog he never seemed capable of being. Without him those kittens might have died.

Now Granny Casey wasn't one to gloat but she made sure that the neighbours were regularly updated on Ajax the parent. She would tell them that he was a better parent than most cats and quite a few humans. She had always known that at some time he would have a use just like everything else in her collection. She knew that if she was patient enough that use would come through on its own.

Granny always said that parenting was a lot like having Ajax around. She said that there were times as a parent when it seems impossible to see anything good in a child. Everything about them looks wrong and out of place, nothing seems right. In fact, sometimes it seems a child is useless. Granny said that lots of

parents think this about their kids but never say it out loud because they think that they are not supposed to feel that way. Yet, at the same time she said that if you backed away from them even for just a moment, you'll see that even in the worst of times kids are capable of doing something unimaginable and incredible. Like with Ajax you just had to have to have the eyes to see it and the ability to step out of the way and let it happen.

The Dirty Truth

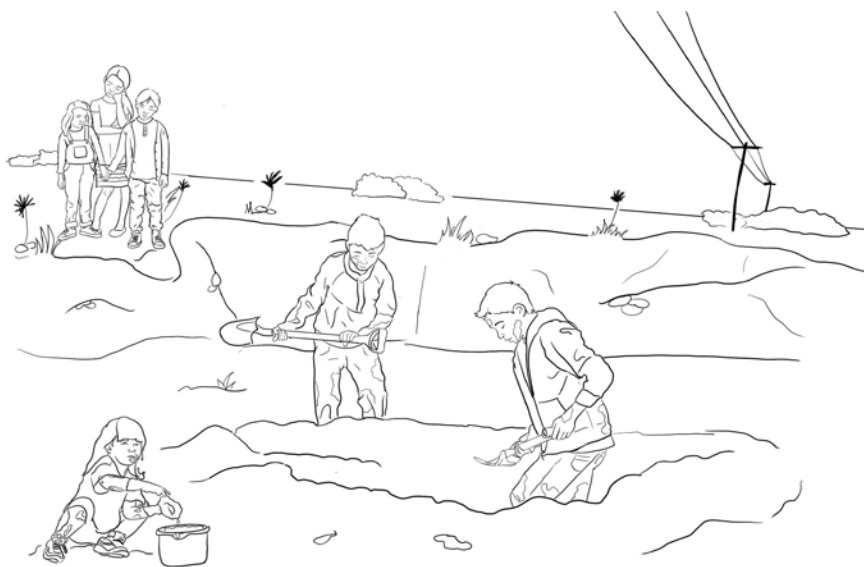


The people in the house one down to the south were perfect. It wasn't like they pretended that they were better than everyone else in the neighbourhood. It's just that the Tuckers always looked like they were better than everyone else. The parents looked perfect, the kids looked perfect and the house looked perfect. They even acted perfectly. All of them

were so polite and always knew exactly how to act and what to say.

Uncle Tim said that the Tucker kids never seemed to get dirty. All the kids in the neighbourhood, big and small, would spend lots of time playing in the dirt lot in the neighborhood. Guess there had been a house there at one time but it was long gone. Someone must have owned the lot but no one seemed to know who. The kids had claimed it as their own.

Anyhow, lots of games were played there in the lot in the summer. Baseball, hide and seek, tag. Someone had even put up an old basketball hoop they had made out of a twisted piece of metal. Usually in the summer one kid or another would be digging a tunnel off in the corner of the lot or fixing up the fort that had been there as long as any kid could remember. One year Uncle Tim and his friends had built a basement in the fort and covered it with some old doors and then covered them with dirt.



When you walked into the fort there was a hollow sound from walking on the covered doors on the ground. Lots of times the kids would eat their lunches in the basement of the fort and come out covered in dirt. It seemed that most of the activities in the lot involved getting dirty either directly or indirectly.

By the end of the day it was often hard to tell where the kids ended and the dirt began. The kids were mounds of walking dirt. That is, all the kids but the Tuckers. They never seemed to get involved enough in the play to get real dirty. It's not that they didn't play. It's just that they never seemed to play as hard as the other kids. According to Uncle Tim they always seemed to be holding back. Uncle Tim said they enjoyed themselves but never as much as the other kids. Like for instance he couldn't remember them ever laughing hard. You know the kind of laugh kids have where they're laughing so hard that they're rolling on the ground and trying real hard not to pee themselves. He never saw them laugh that way.

The Tuckers' house was much the same as the kids. It wasn't a fancy house and the Tuckers didn't put on false airs. It was just a regular house like every other one in the neighbourhood. It was the same and yet somehow different. Uncle Tim said it was hard to describe but it was just always so clean. When you went into the house you never quite felt comfortable. You were afraid to touch anything in case you got it dirty or broke it or something. It felt like no one lived there. Not a bit like Granny's house. The Tuckers' house was just too clean or too right

Uncle Tim says, looking back, that it seems that everything the Tuckers did was just too right. They were there but somehow the parents, the kids and the house were holding back.

The parents never got mad at the kids or yelled at them or anything. Years later when he was a young adult Uncle Tim asked Granny Casey once how come the Tuckers never yelled at their kids or how come the kids never seemed to do anything wrong. Granny told him that once when the Tuckers had first moved into the neighbourhood she had gone over to welcome them. She took over some oatmeal cookies on her best plate to say hello. Soon the conversation turned to kids and the Tuckers had told her that they were proud of their kids. They said they took pride in being great parents. They wanted to be great and they wanted their kids to be great. They taught the kids how to act, how to do the right things and how to behave. Granny said the Tuckers taught their kids how to do everything but be themselves. She said that they were trying so hard to be great parents that they forgot what was important. Granny always said that the trick wasn't to be a great parent but to be a good enough parent. The kind of parent who makes mistakes, sometimes yells at their kids and most importantly accepts that getting dirty is one of the best parts of growing up.

Whistling in the Dark



Granny Casey loved trains. She was a Great Plains woman and that's why she loved trains. You couldn't help but love trains if you grew up on the plains. I guess there were some people who lived there who didn't love trains but they were as rare as rain during a drought. You know those droughts that hit the plains so often that it's a safe bet to say no one got rich farming in these parts.

Anyhow, in her younger years trains were the lifelines of all the communities dotted across the flatlands. Most of these places didn't exist before the trains came and wouldn't exist without them. Many of them died a slow death when the tracks were eventually pulled up years later. In her days the trains were the way in and out of the area in the years before the good roads were built. It wasn't that there weren't roads. There were roads in those days although they were mostly old trapper and wagon trails that had been fixed up but were still impassible much of the year. Even where new roads had been built most people still used the trains to go any distance. Some because the new roads weren't all that great but mostly because they didn't own cars. Granny was one of these people.



As importantly, trains were also about dreams. For some it was dreams about wonderful surprises brought from faraway places. All sorts of wonderful bangles and beads, cloths and the latest gadgets. Most people couldn't afford the stuff but that was where the dreaming came into play. Even if you couldn't afford the stuff you could always dream about the day when you or your children could.

Trains also brought dreams of far away places. Young people dreamed of places they could go to escape the flatlands or build a future. Older people remembered families and friends they left behind when they first moved to these parts. The trains also meant movement, consistent comings and goings. People used the trains to move to new places, kids used them to go away to college or to look for work in the big cities. In Granny's time husbands and sons had taken the train to war. The lucky ones used the train to come home again.

Granny used to say that the sound of a train whistle on a hot summer night reached her very soul, but this wasn't the main reason she loved trains. She loved trains because of the dreams they conjured up. She loved them because of where they had taken her and where they might take her in the future. She loved trains for lots of reasons but mainly because they were an adventure. She didn't travel a lot on trains because she didn't have the money but every time she did she came home with new stories to tell.

Sometimes the trains were the cause of the adventure like the time a rockslide blocked the tracks. This delayed the train for upwards of twelve hours. Lots of the passengers sat in the cars and complained of the delays. Not Granny Casey. She wandered through the cars, hiked in the gorge where the train was stopped

and most importantly took the time to meet new people. She loved meeting new people.

A lot of times Granny made her own adventures. Once during a bad snow storm people were worried if the train would make it to the main stop down the line. It was just before Christmas and people were worried to get home. You know how people are when they can almost taste home but something gets in the way. Well, soon Granny had everyone singing carols and talking as if they had known each other forever. People broke open packages full of Christmas treats and everyone had a full-blown party. Everybody stopped worrying about getting home. They just enjoyed being together and of course they finally did all get where they were going.

Another time Granny sat next to an old man. She said he was about the saddest looking creature she had ever seen. Not that he was down and out. He was well dressed. Obviously, a man of means. She said that two things stuck out about him. One was that he had sad eyes. The kind of eyes you see on someone who has had a great loss. The other was that he had terrible burn scars on his hands. What made his hands so noticeable was that he tried to hide them. She said she understood why he tried to hide them but at the same time didn't see the point of it because they were as they were. Hiding them didn't change that fact.

It turns out that as they talked this man told her he had been a surgeon at a big hospital back East. A big man in a big city. He had burnt his hands trying to put out a fire that had started in his kitchen. A grease fire on the stove had gotten out of control. The fire destroyed his way of making a livelihood. Granny figured he was as sad for what never was as much as for

losing what he had been. She spent the long night as the train sped along the tracks listening to him talk about his life. She didn't try to change what had happened to him, not that she could have if she tried. She just tried to reach out to him on a train in the night as one person to another who were joined together by circumstances for a brief moment in time. It was another of her adventures, not a happy one but a human one. One of those kinds of adventures so common when one is open to another.

Granny Casey always said that parenting is a lot like being on a train. Lots of parents are just trying to get to a destination as fast as possible. She thought people like that are missing out on the best part of the trip. She figured it was important to know where you wanted to go as a parent in order to get there, just like on a train. At the same time, the best part of parenting, just like on the train, was the journey itself.

Touching the Sky



Each summer right after school let out Granny Casey would say to the kids that it was time to feed the Whiskeyjacks. They're a bird found in the mountains near here that seem willing to eat just about anything. If you take a piece of bread, hold your arm straight out, stand real still and don't even breathe these birds would eat right out of your hand.

They're shy at first but, if you just stand there, they'll hop from tree to tree getting closer and closer to you until suddenly they're right on your hand. It makes you laugh when they do that and, as soon as you do, they fly right away. It's quite the sight.

Anyhow Granny would say it's time to feed the Whiskeyjacks. The kids would pretend they didn't know what she was talking about and just stand there looking dumb. They all knew that when she said it was time to feed the Whiskeyjacks it meant that they were going camping in the mountains for a holiday. This was never a surprise because they went every year. Granny would look at them and they would just stand there looking innocent until suddenly she would start chasing them around the house yelling that they were ungrateful brats who never appreciated what she did for them. Uncle Tim said it was the funniest thing, what with her ranting and raving and everyone running away until they couldn't take it anymore and everyone would fall to the ground laughing and feeling like if it didn't stop they would pee themselves.

Usually a group of families from the neighborhood would get together and set up a camp just inside the first valley where the flatlands meet the mountains. There are no foothills here just the plains and the mountains. It's a special place. You look one way and all there is are miles and miles of grassland as far as the eye can see. You look the other way and it's just walls of rock. There's no place better on Earth with the sun shining down on you bright in the sky. You know what heaven is like when you stand there.

The camp was nothing much. A creek nearby for water and washing and some clearings for the tents. Not that anybody had what you would call real tents. The families had large pieces of canvas rigged up with rope and branches as a sleeping shelter.

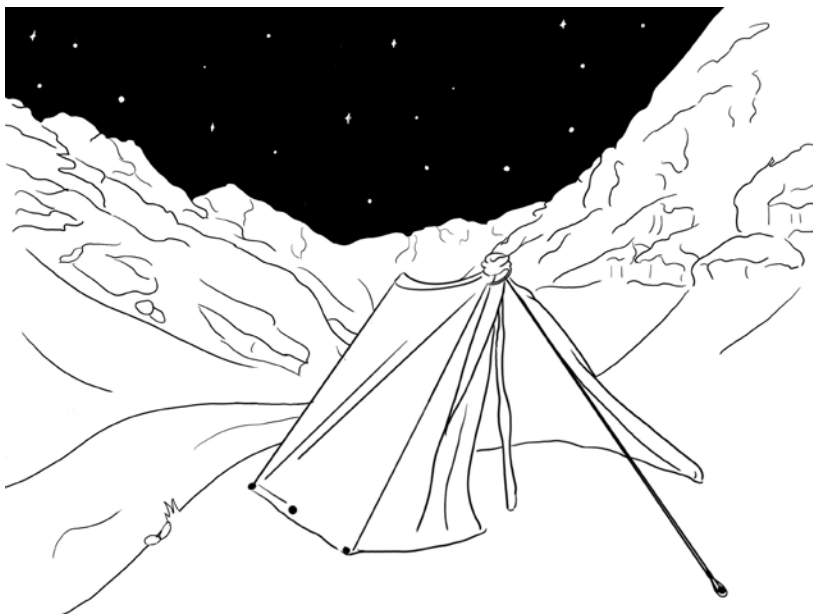
Nothing fancy but that didn't matter much because most people slept under the stars when the weather was good. Some sleep outside even when it rained because it just felt so good to lie under an open sky.

There was a lot to do at the camp. At night they would pile great pieces of wood on the cooking fire until it was good and high. You know the kind of fire where the sparks float into the darkened sky like fireflies. Every night was pretty much the same. People would gather around the fire. Someone would pull out a guitar or a fiddle and sometimes both and soon everyone would be singing and dancing until they just couldn't do it anymore. After that the stories would start. People loved the stories of the olden days and faraway places but what everyone most waited for was when someone would tell stories of the ghoulies and ghosties and things that went bump in the night. The same ghost stories were told every year yet somehow, in the glow of the fire in the woods in the mountains, the tales always sent a chill down everyone's spine. Then after a good scare people would just slowly fall asleep while staring at the stars. Usually if you stayed awake long enough and were lucky enough you got to see a shooting star or two.

The night times were fun but the daytimes were even better. After a late night of singing and scaring, everyone would say they were going to sleep in but nobody ever did. Once the sun was up people just had to get up and get going because everyday was a new adventure. Not that much was ever organized. Things just happened. Games, crafts, swimming in the creek. There was always something to do and someone to do it with. And of course, there was always time to feed the Whiskeyjacks.

Now there was one thing that was organized each year by Granny Casey just for her and her kids. She wouldn't let them know before hand that it was coming. She would just announce after breakfast that she was going on her walking. They would pack up some food. The kids knew the walking was going to take a while so they would always make sure to fill up the canteens at the creek. It wouldn't do to get too thirsty.

The kids all knew where they were going. Walking with Granny meant going to the top of Bear's Hump. The Hump was a jut of rock sticking out from the mountain nearest the camp that some said looked like the hump on a grizzly bear. It was a healthy hike up to the top of the Hump. It would take Granny and the kids the better part of the morning to get to the top but the walk was worth it. There was no other view quite like it. Uncle Tim said that as a kid he felt like he was on top of the world when they got to the highest point. You could almost touch the sky.



Granny used to talk about how the walking changed over the years. When the kids were younger you had to keep them near and even as they got older you had to keep your eye on them. Of course, then you didn't let them know that because they didn't always like the thought that someone was looking out for them. The first time she went on the walking Granny only took Uncle John because the rest were too small. She said although she was excited about the hike she was also scared because she didn't really know where she was going. She had heard all about the hike from lots of other people but really had no clue what it would actually be like doing it. It was a tough walk but they finished it and were rewarded with the view. As the years went on and the others got old enough to join in, the hike got easier. Granny figured that it wasn't just that the kids got older. It was also because she had learned what to expect around every corner. Not that it was always easy. Once they came across a bear and had to take a wide detour to get around it safely. Just one of those surprises that happens no matter how prepared you are.

Granny always said that parenting was a lot like that hike to the top of Bear's Hump. Parenting gets easier as you learn your way. Sometimes it is darn right hard especially when the kids are younger. Even when they are older you have to watch out for unpleasant surprises around the corner. At the same time parenting, like hiking, is worth all the effort. Granny Casey always said that even with all the work it takes once you get to the top you just can't beat the view.

The Sneak Thief



piss and vinegar. That's how Granny used to describe Aunt Alison. She would say that Aunt Alison had been born with piss and vinegar and would die with piss and vinegar. Aunt Alison was the youngest of all the kids. In some families the youngest are treated like a baby. You know, being the youngest they are seen by the parents as being somehow special. Trouble is they grow up being treated like the baby and

always end up acting like one. Not Aunt Alison. She wasn't treated any different from the other kids and so she didn't really act any different.

Not that the kids were all the same. Each had their different ways about them. You know, different mannerisms, different ways of doing things. For example, Uncle Tim tended to rush into things. This got him into lots of difficulties over the years but it also brought him lots of adventures. Uncle John was a thinker. He never rushed into anything except maybe the bathroom the time when Uncle Tim gave him a laxative and told him it was chocolate. John enjoyed every bite but spent a lot of time that night on the toilet. Granny Casey was fit to be tied when she figured out what had happened. She wanted to give Uncle Tim a taste of his own medicine but somehow controlled herself. She always said that parents needed a lot of self-control and she sure needed it that night. She did make Uncle Tim stay up with Uncle John to make sure he was all right. She stayed up too but made sure Uncle Tim took responsibility for what he did. He had to help clean up a mess or two that happened that night.

Anyhow that's a whole other story. The point is that each of the kids were similar what with the same main beliefs but they were also different from each other. Aunt Alison was the youngest but no one treated her like a baby. Not that they could have even if they had wanted. She wouldn't have let them. From the moment she could crawl she was determined to do what the other kids were doing - had a pig headedness about her that way. As Granny said she was full of piss and vinegar. As she got older she gave as good as she got from the other kids. She was feisty and had a set of lungs on her that would have made one of those

Italian opera singers proud. People learned early and learned fast not to get on the wrong side of her. At the best of times she was like a storm blowing through a room. She was never one to do anything by half measures.

Not that the other kids couldn't get the best of her at times. They just had to be very careful in how they did it. It didn't happen very often and it never happened when she got older but sometimes when she was younger it happened. Probably the best time happened when she was about seven. They got her to do something one night that if she had gotten caught would have gotten her into the worst of trouble. To know this story, you have to know that once a year Granny would spend the whole weekend baking for the church bazaar. It was a big fund-raiser. The money was used to help people out who were down on their luck. It was an important event for Granny.



She would bake all her special recipes. Her cakes and her pies were great. The pies were the talk of the neighbourhood. They were always the first thing that sold out. But it was her cookies her kids loved best. She knew that and so she didn't ignore them while she was baking. Anyone who volunteered to help her out got to taste the wares and lick out the bowls. Of course, there was no shortage of volunteers. No one had to drag the kids out of their beds on those mornings.

Anyhow Granny always made sure that the kids got their share of the treats. Or else she thought they did but kids being kids they always wanted more. Kids and adults always differ about when enough is enough when it comes to treats especially with Granny's baking. Her kids always wanted more and this was the start of what could have been big trouble for Aunt Alison.

The kids went to bed that night with the usual hugs and kisses from Granny. She tucked them all into their beds, even the older ones as she always did. The only difference was that on this night she warned them all not to get into the baked goods. She trusted her kids but she also knew the temptation they were feeling. When it comes to cookies kids don't always feel the normal rules apply.

You need to know that the kids' bedrooms were on the second floor of the house. To get to them you had to go through the front hall and up the stairs. There was no way to get to the kitchen from the bedrooms without going through the living room. Now the kids knew that Granny Casey would clean up the house for a while after they went to bed and then sit for awhile in the living room reading one of her books. The kids had already been putting together a plan to get some cookies even before they went to bed. The plan involved the location of the

sofa and Aunt Alison. You see they reckoned that Alison being the smallest could get down the stairs without being seen. She could then crawl to the kitchen by sneaking past Granny behind the sofa. It was risky but the kids figured that only Aunt Alison would get into trouble if she was caught. Even Alison figured it was worth it since the prize was some of Granny's cookies.

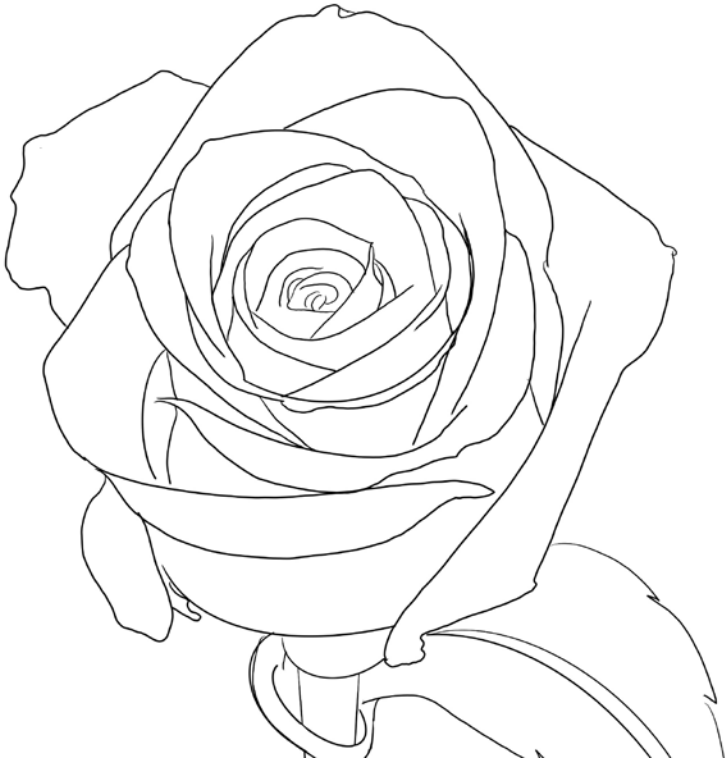
Aunt Alison crept down the stairs. Now, these stairs had a lot of wear what with kids running up and down them all the time. They creaked while Alison went down them even though she was trying her hardest to be quiet. A couple of times she thought she was going to get caught but Granny just kept on reading her book. Aunt Alison finally got to the bottom of the stairs and crawled into the kitchen. She was just a few feet from Granny but figured she was so quiet that there was no way she could be caught. She even held her breath for the last little while. Finally, she got into the kitchen grabbed some cookies and made her way back. She had to crawl so quietly past the sofa but she did it and made it back up the stairs. The other kids were at the top of the stairs waiting and watching. They figured for sure that there was no way she was going to get away with it. Well, it turned out that Aunt Alison made it and each of them got some cookies. Alison kept an extra one because she figured she deserved it. No one argued with her not because they thought she was right but because they didn't want her to start yelling. They figured it was a small price to pay for not having Granny find out what happened.

For years the kids would talk among themselves about how they had pulled a fast one over on Granny Casey. It was like a point of honour for them, the sort of things legends are made from in the minds of kids. It wasn't until she was an adult that

Alison figured out what had really happened. She was walking down the stairs at Granny's house and it struck her how creaky the stairs were. She stopped dead in her tracks at the bottom of the stairs and looked at the sofa. The space behind the sofa that had looked so big when she was smaller now looked so small. She knew clearly that there was no way that Granny wouldn't have known she was there. She had been a good sneaker but not that good. After having a good laugh, she went and talked to Granny. She wanted to know if Granny had known all along what had happened.

Granny hooted when Aunt Alison asked about the great cookie adventure. She had one of those laughs that come from deep inside. You know the kind that when you hear it you just got to laugh yourself. Soon Alison and her were splitting their guts they were laughing so hard. Once she had calmed down Granny admitted that she had known all along what the kids were up to that night. She had even left some cookies out on the table that they could get. She knew the temptation was going to be too great. She also knew that sometimes you just have to let your kids think that they could outsmart you. It helps them develop a sense of control over their lives. Like Granny always said, sometimes winning is as important as playing the game. Not all the time, not even most of the time but always some of the time.

A Rose is a Rose is a Rose



There was an old woman across the road who lived on her own. Her husband had been dead for a number of years. He used to work on the railroad and had left her a small pension when he passed. It wasn't much but she lived a comfortable life. Her name was Betty Anderson but everyone

called her Rose. They called her Rose because she was the greatest gardener in the neighbourhood. Maybe she was the best in the whole district. Certainly, she usually took first prize for her flowers at the annual fall fair. That wasn't an easy task because there were a number of fine gardeners entered each year.

I suppose people could have called her Carnation or Orchid because she was the best at growing those flowers. She could have been called almost any garden name because she was just that good, but they called her Rose because that was what she was the best at growing. She loved her roses and it seemed they loved her. People were always dropping in unannounced to see her roses. Lots of times total strangers would drop by. Some Sundays you could look over to her house and see people just quietly standing on the walk in front of her house staring at her roses. She always made everyone feel welcome, inviting them into the yard and giving them lemonade or a cup of tea. Sometimes neighbours would ask if she was afraid of all these strangers coming by but she would always answer that anyone who loved roses enough to travel some distance to see them couldn't be all bad.

What impressed people the most about the roses were how well they grew in her yard. The soil in these parts is pretty rough. Not the kind of clay that roses do well in but rather a dried out almost sandy soil that tried the patience of most gardeners. Sometimes it seemed more like dust than earth. Least ways that was what Granny always said: that most yards were more dustbowls than gardens. Not that you couldn't grow anything. Everyone had gardens. People grew potatoes, corn, beets and the like. Lots of the food people in the neighbourhood ate came from their gardens. It was just the way it was. People needed the

food from their gardens. Maybe that made the difference. People needed the vegetables so they made it work. They didn't need the roses. Whatever the reason Rose was one of the few that could make her roses prosper. If she hadn't been quite as good at it as she was, people probably have been jealous of her. The problem was she was just so good that all you could do was marvel at her. It made you feel good just to know you lived in the same neighbourhood as her. It was sort of like living next door to the mayor or some famous baseball player. Living near the rose lady just somehow made you special.

People were always trying to figure out why her roses grew so well. There were lots of thoughts about it, but it never seemed to work when people tried it in their own gardens. Once one of those scientists from the agricultural station came by to check out her roses. He tested this and tested that but never could figure out why the roses looked special in her yard. Granny Casey said she had it figured out why she was such a great gardener. She said that Mrs. Anderson was a woman full of love. She never had kids of her own. Granny never knew why. It wasn't something that you asked people in those days. Anyhow Granny figured that she gave all the love she couldn't give to kids of own to her flowers. This made sense to people in the neighbourhood because Mrs. Anderson sure was full of love. The kids in the neighbourhood couldn't get enough of her. She was one of those adults that always had the time of day for the neighbourhood kids. She always had time for a chat or to give a kid a treat. Usually she had time for both. You know, she was one of those people who made candy apples at Halloween. Kids couldn't wait for Halloween just to get their hands on those candy apples. Even today Uncle John says come Halloween he

can still taste those apples. According to him they just melted in your mouth. That is after you first took a big crunchy bite and got that burst of sour apple and sweet sugar. A kid's taste of heaven is what Uncle John called them.

Granny Casey said that she knew Mrs. Anderson would have been a great parent. She said she knew this because Mrs. Anderson had taught her a lot about parenting. Not that Mrs. Anderson talked about being a parent because she never did. What she talked about was growing roses. Like Mrs. Anderson used to talk about her wild roses. These roses grew in the coulees in these parts. Wild and unruly yet at the same time delicate and beautiful in their own way. You can grow them in your garden but you have to pay attention to them. These roses will spread out and take over the place if you don't care for them the right way. They start out small but soon they take over your yard and your time if you don't mind them properly. When they first start to grow you have to keep a close eye on them or else they sprout every which way. You also have to cut the little shoots they send out. Of course, you have to be careful here because even though you want to tame them enough to help them fit into the garden you don't want to spoil their wildness. That's where they get their beauty. It's important to remember that wild ones are all very special in their own way. With the proper care they aren't really all that difficult to grow.

Mrs. Anderson also grew other types of roses. She grew a beautiful lavender coloured rose. These were pretty rare in our district in those days. Lots of wild ones, but not as many of the gentler beautiful ones. She said that every rose colour had a special meaning. According to an old gardening book she had, lavender meant enchantment. She said that she always wanted

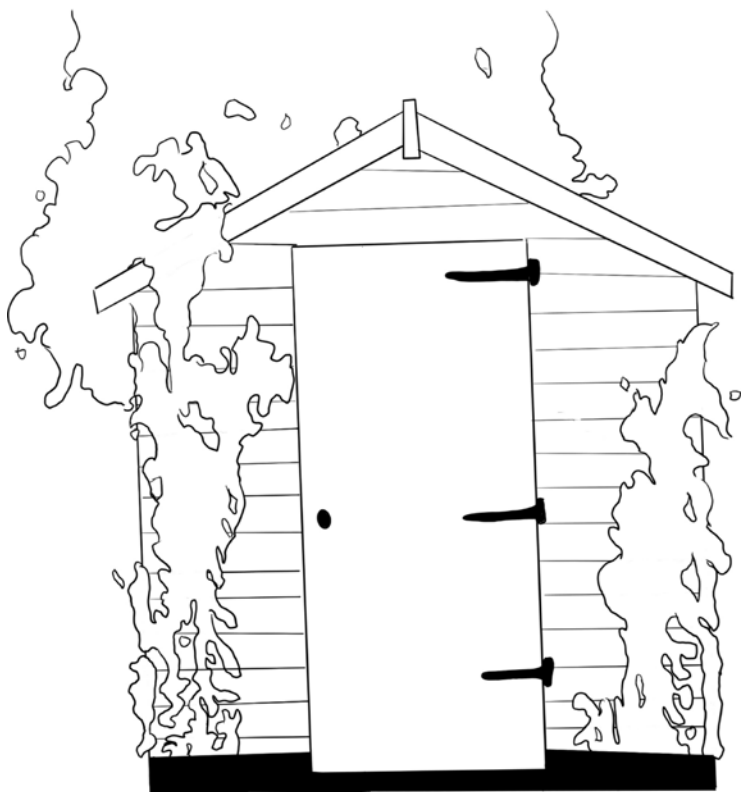
her garden to be enchanting and knew that it was because she could grow those roses there. She called those roses her quiet ones. Most people figured that because they looked so beautiful they didn't need as much attention. She said they were wrong. If anything, they need that extra special care to ensure that they survive during times when enchantment can get lost. They needed extra fertilizer. Mrs. Anderson said the natural kind was best. She also said that they were more susceptible to spider mites and other bugs. You needed to keep a close eye on them in order to ensure that they were able to bloom fully.



She also grew more regular roses. These ones if they were planted properly seemed to do well anywhere in her garden. They needed water but not too much. You had to breed in them a hardiness for the winter and an ability to thrive even in the worst of times. You needed to cover them with a protective sheet if the weather got too bad, but for the most part you just had to get out of their way and let them grow - always keeping a quiet eye on them in case they really needed you, but for the most part just letting them find their own way in the garden.

Granny said that Mrs. Anderson taught her that even though those flowers were all called roses they weren't all the same. Each of them could grow well as long as you realized that they needed different types of attention. The wild ones needed some help staying on course. The quiet ones needed more attention than people realized and the regular ones did well on their own just as long as you realized that they also needed extra care when the weather got rough. Granny always said that she reckoned the same applied for kids. If you took the time to figure out what they needed then they could grow well just about anywhere. Each one would grow to be special and beautiful in their own unique way.

The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions



Uncle John was never sure if Granny Casey disliked Billy Roberts. He didn't think so because that wasn't her way. She tended to give kids the benefit of the doubt. Didn't accept all of their behavior, but did tend to accept each and

every one of them. She made it a rule to give kids every break she could, but there is an exception to every rule and in Granny's case the exception just may have been Billy. She used to say that he was a child who could try the patience of a corpse.

If she did like him, then she was the only one in the neighbourhood who did. He lived with his parents a few houses down. He was an only child. Sometimes he acted as if he was the only child in the world. Least ways that was how the other kids in the neighbourhood saw him. Most of the adults too.

Billy was a boy with a mean streak. The other kids tended to stay away from him because he was always causing trouble. He would bully the younger kids although he never tried anything physical with anyone bigger or anyone who stuck up to him. Once he tried to push around Aunt Alison. She was quite a bit smaller than him but he hadn't realized that she didn't take guff from anyone. Size never stopped her from sticking up for herself. Anyhow she easily put him in his place with a couple of kicks to his shins and a shout loud enough to wake the dead. He left her alone after that. It was lucky for him that he did because her brothers would have had something to say about Billy picking on their younger sister. Not that she needed help, but that was just the way they were. They might fight with her themselves but damned if they were going to let anyone else do so.

Anyhow it was obvious even from an early age that Billy Roberts had a mean spiritedness about him. It wasn't just the kids who stayed away from him. It was also the neighbourhood pets. No one knew why. Maybe he had hurt a few of them. Maybe they just knew to leave him alone. Animals are like that. They seem to know somewhere inside who to go near and who

to leave alone. Little kids are often like that too. Seems somehow, we don't pay attention to this part of ourselves when we get older. It's kind of funny that many of us adults reckon we're smarter than kids and animals when often they're brighter than us.

Now you don't want to blame one person for everything that goes wrong in the neighbourhood but it was hard not to do with Billy. Whenever there was trouble Billy seemed to be nearby. Never right there, but almost always pretty close. Like the time Granny's back shed burnt down. This happened a few days after his run in with Aunt Alison. The shed just burnt down one day. No one ever figured out why the fire started but Billy showed up soon after the fire was noticed by a neighbour. Didn't offer to help put the fire out like everyone else was doing. He just stood back and watched with a funny little smile on his face.

It could have been a coincidence that he was there. Anything's possible. However, this just seemed to happen too often with Billy. This was the last straw for some of the neighbours. Some of them started to talk about getting Billy and his folks out of the neighbourhood. According to Aunt Alison, Granny got mighty uncomfortable with this kind of talk. Instead she decided to talk to his folks herself.

This was the kind of thing that really tore Granny Casey apart. She believed that most of the time it was important to mind one's own business. At the same time, she figured that adults have responsibility for all the kids in the neighbourhood. If a kid was in trouble it was her job as a neighbour to help him out and she figured this was a kid in trouble. The next Sunday morning she walked over to have a word with Billy's parents.

She took over one of her famous pies because she figured even the worst of news is easier to take with a little bit of sugar.

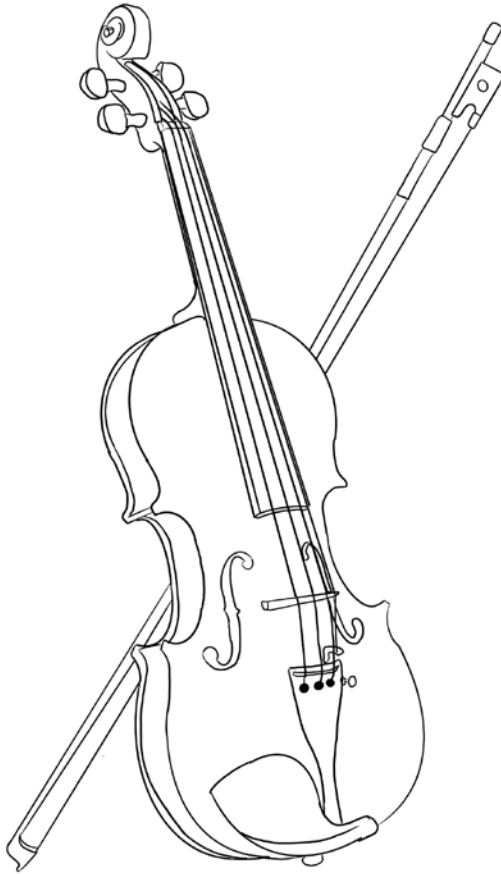
Anyway, the Roberts' invited her into the house, gave her a cup of coffee and listened to what she had too say. Granny Casey could be blunt at times. Not that she was rude because she wasn't, but she knew the importance of making sure that people understood exactly what she was meaning. That was just the way she was that day. She didn't blame Billy for things she wasn't sure about, but she did tell them her suspicions and didn't beat around the bush. She had her say and then shut up. She waited for them to reply. She later said she waited for the longest time for them to say something.



As she sat there, she half expected them to get mad at her. Instead they did something that took her completely by surprise. They both sat there looking sadder and sadder. Finally, Mr. Roberts said they knew he was a bit rambunctious. They knew he caused problems in the neighbourhood. Granny was about to ask them why they didn't stop him when Mrs. Roberts jumped in and said they didn't believe they should put limits on him. They figured being told no and telling a kid his behaviour was unacceptable would make a kid have low self-esteem. Not that they used that word. What they said was that they didn't want Billy to feel bad about himself. They then both looked at her and she realized it was time for her to leave. As she was walking out the door she knew in her heart of hearts that nothing was going to change. Billy was just going to keep on doing what he was doing until some day he really got into trouble. After that Granny kept her kids away from Billy. So did the other adults in the neighbourhood.

Billy and his parents moved out of the neighbourhood a couple of months later. Granny heard a few years after that Billy had ended up in jail for committing some crime or another. Aunt Alison said that Granny wasn't surprised when she heard the news. Granny said what the Roberts didn't seem to get was that they had been killing Billy with mistaken kindness. She said that kids need to feel bad when they do something bad. This is one of the ways kids learn how to do good things. Besides it's not what you feel but what you do that counts. Granny always said that this is one of the most important lessons that parents can teach their kids and themselves.

The Death of the Music



Granny Casey was a risk taker. She taught her kids to be risk takers too. The type of risk depended on each kid. She believed that each of her kids had their own strengths and weaknesses and because of this each of them had to take different risks. Each had to overcome their own fears. Climbing

a mountain can be risky for anyone. However, if you climb a mountain even when you are afraid of heights then you're a real risk taker. Granny knew that if you didn't take risks you really never could achieve anything. You had to be willing to fail if you wanted to succeed.

The biggest risk that Granny Casey reckoned she ever took was when she decided to learn to play the fiddle. She had always dreamed about playing a musical instrument but just never seemed to get around to it. You know how it is when you're a parent. Something always comes up especially when the kids are little. You never seem to have any time you can call your own.

Anyway, when the kids were all in their teens Granny decided to learn to play the fiddle. Make the music was how she described it. This wasn't an easy step for her. Despite her gruffness there was a part of Granny that was shy. She wasn't afraid to take a stand on any issue important to her but like a lot of adults she just didn't like to draw attention to herself. She found public attention kind of embarrassing. I guess like a lot of people she was afraid that people would laugh at her. This didn't stop her from doing what she needed to do but it made it hard for her doing something like playing the fiddle.

After making every excuse to herself she could think of about why she didn't have the time to learn to play she decided she couldn't put it off any longer. It was time for her to make the music.

Now there are some folks who can pick up an instrument and just start to play it. They're kind of magical that way. Well it would be great if I could tell you that Granny was one of those people. She wasn't. Music didn't come naturally to her. She was so bad that people used to say she needed a wheelbarrow just to

carry a tune. Of course, the smart ones wouldn't say that to her face but they would sure think it. Anyone who ever heard her sing would think it but like I said the smart ones never said it. Never.

Now Granny was no fool. She knew she needed help to learn to play the music. And not just any help but the best help she could find. In these parts this meant Mr. Gabor. Lots of people taught music in the neighbourhood and even more played instruments. After all music was the best darn entertainment there was and it was free if you made it yourself. Free was all about what people could afford in those days. Anyhow, Mr. Gabor was the best of a good lot of people. He was a Hungarian - least way he was before he moved to this country. He was a tall man with dark hair and even darker eyes. He had the kind of eyes that when he was angry made you think that there really was a devil. Not that he got mad often but when he did you sure knew it. Granny figured that he must have been a prince or a count or something in the old country not because he really was but because he looked like he should have been. Really dignified looking.

Anyhow she started her lessons. Uncle Tim later said the kids never knew she was taking lessons at first. She took them during the day when the kids were at school. He figured she must have practiced in the root cellar when no one was around. She told Uncle Tim later that she had been taking lessons for six months before she figured it was time for anyone other than Mr. Gabor to hear her play.

One night she gathered all the kids together in the kitchen after supper. That is, she gathered them together once the chores and homework were done. The kids didn't know what was going

on but knew it was pretty serious because of the look on Granny's face. Uncle Tim said she had a look of pure terror and holy anticipation at the same time. A look like someone would make if they just drank prune juice but liked it.

After Granny hummed and hawed for a while she reached into the broom closet and pulled out the fiddle. Mr. Gabor showed up at this time and called it a violin but Granny insisted on calling it a fiddle because violin just sounded a bit too high and mighty for her. The kids couldn't figure out what she was doing because they knew she couldn't play the darn thing. Least ways they thought this because they had never seen her play.



And you know they turned out to be right. Granny put the thing up to her chin, lifted the bow like she knew what she was doing and started to play. Play may not have been the best description cause all the kids would later agree that it was just about the worst fiddle playing they had ever heard even to this day. After six months of working hard she still couldn't play the darn thing. No amount of practice would ever change that because she was tone deaf.

Even then despite how bad it was the kids all said later that it was one of the best concerts they had ever heard. Not because of her skills, because there was a sorry lack of them. It was the best because of the look of pure joy that came across Granny's face. They knew the look wasn't because of the music but because she had taken a risk. She had overcome a fear. A big fear. When she was done they hooted and hollered and told her she should go on the radio. They crowded around her and patted her on the back. Mr. Gabor sat at the table with a big smile on his face. Now Granny knew she wasn't all that great, but she knew she had done something special. Instead of people laughing at her she had - by doing that kitchen concert - laughed at her fear. She had proven to herself that she was better than she had thought she was. It was a great day.

The only sad thing about the whole deal was what happened the next morning. Granny heard from a neighbour that Mr. Gabor had died sometime in the night. He just didn't wake up in the morning. Everyone figured he had died of old age because after all he was older than the hills. Granny Casey reckoned so too except for the small part of her that figured it was her fiddle playing that had killed him. Killed him because he just couldn't stand to live in a world where someone played the fiddle so

badly. She put her fiddle away after that. She said it was out of respect for Mr. Gabor. The kids never disagreed with her. They knew that in some way she never needed to play again because she had achieved her dream. She had taken the risk and for a moment lived her dream.

Granny Casey always said that a big part of parenting was teaching her kids to take risks and try to live their dreams. She reckoned that kids should be encouraged to take risks. Never too big that failure was certain, but also never too small that the risk of failure wasn't there lurking in the background. She knew that taking risks herself was the best way of encouraging them to also do so. She knew that kids needed to give their kids the opportunity to become risk takers. Of course, she also knew that it was best if you didn't kill the fiddle teacher along the way.

Dancing in the Rain



Some parents like to be really protective of their kids. Granny Casey would say that this is a good thing because one of the jobs of parents is to try to stop their kids from coming to harm. However, she also felt it is a parent's duty to prepare their kids to step full force into the world. She didn't think holding kids back did them any favours.

Take the case of Uncle Tim. Granny called him her wild child. Now if there was any kid who needed holding back at all it was Tim. Some kids come into this world with a silver spoon in their mouth. Tim came into the world with a noise-maker in one hand and a party hat on his head. Granny Casey said he was her

fastest delivery. She thought it was as if he couldn't wait to get his hands on the world. The first thing he did when he came out was to do his business on the midwife. Everyone that was in the room at the time later swore he was smiling as he did it. Granny said then and there that he was going to be a handful. As was often the case what Granny reckoned about someone was exactly right.

Now it wasn't like Tim was bad. No one thought he had a bad bone in his body. In fact, he was a gentle soul. As many of his friends and quite a few strangers would attest, as a kid and, later, as an adult, he would give you the shirt off his back. He didn't do this because he got something out of it or it made him feel good. He just helped people because he thought it was the right thing to do. There's not enough Tims in the world. Not enough by far.

Uncle Tim was also a charmer. He had a smile that could light up a room and a sparkle in his eyes that could blind you. You know, the kind of person that at times seems to shine. Granny said that the parents of his friends would often approach her and say how glad they were that their kids were friends of Tim. So, when Granny Casey said he was her wild child it wasn't that she was saying he was bad, but boy could he get in trouble. Not the kind of trouble that meant the police would come a-knocking at the door. It was the kind of trouble that made you remember that he was around. It wasn't what you would call attention seeking. It was just that he always seemed to be throwing himself fully into life.

You always knew that something was brewing with that boy. In fact, Granny always said that when things were quiet around the house something was about to happen. You know,

the calm before the storm kind of thing. He was a storm waiting to happen. It was always that way with Tim, even before he could walk. Once when he was in that first trying to walk stage he split his head open. Now he wasn't walking yet. He was in that wobbly stage where he would pull himself up on something and just try his darndest not to fall over.

Well this one day he had pulled himself up to the edge of a table that Granny had in her front room. Today we would call it a coffee table but in those days they just called it a table. Not that they didn't drink coffee in that room. They just didn't feel a need to give the table a name of its own. Anyway, on that day a few of the family were sitting around in the front room reading and talking to each other. Nobody was doing anything particularly special. Just sitting around and relaxing, you know, like people do who enjoy each other's company. It was one of those days. So, Uncle Tim pulled himself up with one hand. It was quite a feat of strength when you think of it but small kids are like that when they get a notion in their head. He could only use one hand because he had his truck in his other hand. It was really only a piece of wood he had picked up somewhere. It didn't even look like a truck. He never even called it a truck. He did call it something that might have been truck but he wasn't speaking clearly yet and it could have been anything. They all just figured it was a truck because he was always making truck noises as he pushed it somewhere or another.

So, he was standing there hanging on for dear life on to the edge of the table, legs a wobbling and knees near collapse. He was there like this for a while with everyone wondering if they should go over and grab him before he fell over, when suddenly he makes his loudest truck noise to date. He let out a loud 'ummm'

and just as suddenly he starts moving down the table pushing the truck. Well it was moving but it sure wasn't walking. More like a barely controlled sideways fall. Everyone just stopped what they were doing and stared as Tim picked up speed and revved up the noise. He went faster and faster and got louder and louder. They knew he was heading for a crash but it was like they were stuck to the spot. As he went faster time seemed to stand still. He was moving too fast to get to him but so slow that everyone remembered every detail of what happened. Almost as if they were frozen in time with him. No one moved. They just stared at Tim and his truck rushing to disaster.



And what a disaster it was. He flew off the end of the table and hit the floor with a crash. The truck flew up in the air and returned to earth with a thud. The thud sound was made when the truck hit Tim smack in the forehead. Split the skin on his forehead wide open. Enough that he needed stitches. Still has a scar there to this date. There was blood everywhere. Blood and pandemonium. Everyone was so busy rushing to him that nobody was really paying attention to what Tim was doing.

When they finally noticed that something was odd they also realized that Tim was then and there making family history. What he was doing was laughing. Not crying like you would expect a kid to do if he had split his head open, but laughing. And not just a little laugh but one of those laughs that only comes from deep within. Only the kind of laugh a kid can make when he feels he's on top of the world. He really only stopped laughing when the doc put the stitches in his head and this was some time after the fact. Granny had run down the street with Tim in her arms to the doc's house a few blocks over. There she was running down the street as fast as she could, blood all over the place and Tim laughing his fool head off. People still tell this story today when the family gets together. Unlike most stories over time this one doesn't even get embellished.

The funny thing was, in all this time, he never let go of his truck, which somehow had appeared back in his hand after it hit his head. No one could ever figure out how.

There were lots of stories like that about Uncle Tim. How he scrapped some paint off the wall in one room to see what was underneath. How he carved his name on the headboard of his bed just because it was his. The point is, Granny had every reason in the world to keep him really close. She did keep an eye

on him like she did with all her kids. Maybe even a little closer than the others at times when he needed it, but she never over protected him. She could have made him more cautious and maybe a little afraid of the world but she knew he had to find his way in the world. She knew holding him back would only hurt him in the long run. After all, as Granny Casey always said, trying to dance around the raindrops gets you just as wet as if you had run laughing and shouting fully into the storm.

Do You Believe in Magic?



Granny had no delusions about how tough life could be. She had seen the worst. She had lived through many tragedies and struggles. The death of her husband. Struggles to keep a roof over the kids' heads and to put food on the table. She knew the rough side of life.

She knew it was important that the kids be prepared for the worst. She worked hard at teaching them to make sure they had their eyes open to life. She wanted them to be grounded in reality and not floundering around in some dream land. Despite this, Granny was a great believer in teaching her kids to believe in magic. She knew that one of the greatest gifts a parent could give a child was the ability to maintain their innate sense of wonderment about the world. Granny knew that children come into the world bursting with curiosity and awe because everything they first experienced was new and exciting and sometimes scary but always somehow marvelous.

Granny would be constantly encouraging her children to notice the range of greens in the leaves of a tree, the smell of a freshly cut lawn or the sound of the rain against the roof of the house on a summer evening. She had them pay attention to what was happening to them and around them when they hiked across a field on a hot summer day. The feel of the sun upon their skin. How their clothes felt against them as they sweat from walking. The stark blueness of the sky and the heat waves rising from the ground. The pounding of their feet against the hardened ground and the smell of the dust being kicked up with every step they took. The buzz of the insects and the rustle of small unknown creatures moving through the dry grass. She would take time helping them openly notice what they were unconsciously noticing as they walked through their world.

Sometimes on family walks she would have each of the kids pay attention to a single sensation. One's job was to pay attention to sounds while another would focus upon smells and odours. The third would be asked to identify how many different types of plants that were seen on a stretch of the walk. The

fourth was to imagine the types of bugs and animals that might be hiding in the tall grasses along the path the family was walking. Every once in a while on the walk she would pause and sit them down and get them to talk about their observations. The kids took this very seriously although there were always lots of laughs when the one imagining the bugs and animals said what they were thinking. There were always a surprising number of elephants and alligators and dinosaurs and giant poison spiders hiding in the grass. Once they started walking again the kids were given different assignments so that everyone had a chance over the course of a couple of walks to do each kind of observation.



In the minds of the kids and, if truth be told, also Granny, there were elephants and alligators and dinosaurs and giant poison spiders in that grass. Not really, but at the same time it felt possible. Granny encouraged the kids to use their imaginations.

It's like Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. Granny kept insisting they were real long past when the kids had stopped believing. She knew that even when kids don't really believe any more that a small spark inside of them still wants to think that Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy exist.

Granny never understood adults who thought their duty was to get kids to face reality. The kind who saw it as solemn responsibility to ensure their kids let go of their childish notions. Granny thought those parents were robbing their kids of a sense of wonder and awe. She knew that wonder and awe was what made life joyous and she knew that all of us need some joy in our lives especially as adults. Life can be hard enough without us losing the belief that impossibly good things can happen.

Granny did everything she could to instill in her kids the sense that magic can happen. Once when Uncle John was four or five Granny took him to a real barber to get his hair cut. She usually did it herself but this was meant to be a special treat for him. He was so excited. So excited that when he got home, he decided to share his happiness with his teddy bear. When Granny was out of the room, he got her sewing scissors and gave Bob the Bear a haircut. It doesn't take much to imagine the results. Bob lost his bearish good looks.

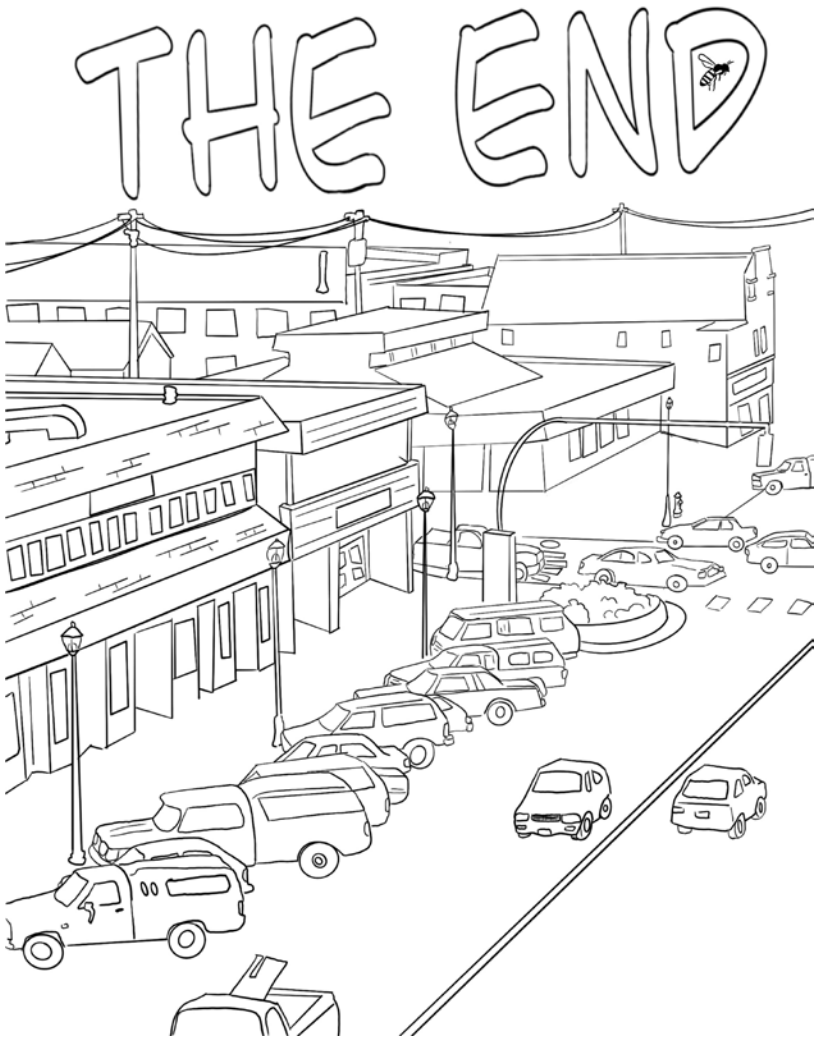
Uncle John was devastated when he saw what he had done. He was sitting on the floor crying when Granny walked into the

room. She held him and then told him that all would be well because Bob had the magic in him. She said it would take a few days but Bob the Bear would be his old self soon enough. Uncle John spent a couple of anxious days wondering how the magic would come out of who the family now called Haircut Bob, but he knew it would because Granny had told him so. You see she kept her word with her kids so they knew if she said something would be, then it would be. Granny knew that it was as important to keep your word with kids as it was with adults. Maybe even more so.

A couple of days later Granny walked into the room where Uncle John was playing with Bob. In her hand was what she told him was her magic pillow case. She held it in the air and said some magic sounding words. You know a few abracadabras and a couple bibbidi-bobbidi-boos. She took Haircut Bob and put him in the pillow case still saying her magic words. After a minute or so of more magic words she stuck her hand in the pillow case and with a loud hocus-pocus she pulled out the old pre-haircut Bob. Uncle John figured he got the biggest smile on his face that any kid had ever had. He hugged Bob the Bear so hard and looked at Granny with a sense of wonder. He knew magic when he saw it and this was magic. The best kind. The kind that made a kid's dream come true.

It wasn't until years later when Uncle John figured out what had happened. Granny had taken a couple of evenings after the kids were in bed to make a new Bob. Luckily, she still had cloth left over from when she made the old one. Using "magic" she switched the bears in the pillow case and pulled out the new one. A simple act for an adult but magic to a child.

Granny Casey knew the importance of magic for young people. She knew that in order to learn to hope for the future young people have to first think that anything is possible. Granny always said that believing in magic was the first step.



We don't need a pile of long-winded books to help us be good parents. All we need is some straight-forward support and some good old-fashioned advice. Granny Casey knew how to parent. It's easy to conjure up an image of the ideal grandmother. Quiet, soft spoken, grey haired, gentle. Plates of cookies, bowls of candies.

Well, Granny Casey wasn't anything like that. No hands-off parenting for her. She was an in your face type of parent so rarely seen today. No pampering or self-actualization for her kids. Her kids were raised to live in the world. They were raised to be respectful, responsible and realistic. Granny had clear expectations of her children.

The stories in this book contains advice Granny Casey either gave or would have given about parenting given half the chance.



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