

Giving Our Kids The Gift of Time **by Dorothy Rich**

My grandchildren are still at ages (6 and 4) when coming with Grandma back to her house is something they want to do. Grandmas and Grandpas know well that this is a limited moment. All too soon, the kids will say: “Aw, I want to play with my friends instead, and “Do I have to?”

Lucky enough to live near my grandchildren, I take each boy separately on his own with me to my house once a week. We don't go anywhere. We stay home... on purpose.

Home is where we do the activities that I write about . What I encourage others to do, I do myself. So every week, the little boys and I teach and learn... in the kitchen, in the yard, in the car, wherever we happen to be, using whatever we have with us.

I believe in laying the base for academics but not by using materials that come packaged at the store. Reading, writing, math are organic in the world around us. This is the time to build the connections for children to the academics in the world, not just in the classroom.

In the car, we read all the signs at the side of the car. STOP is a longtime favorite. We read signs together. We count them. We talk about the sign shape and color. No basal reader can compete.

We notice. We go on around the block walks, each of us carrying paper bags, to be filled with treasures. At first, it's anything that appeals, a leaf, a smooth stone, a sharp stick. Next we do alphabet walks, Let's find or identify something that starts with A, all the way to Z.

This summer, we planted a tomato plant and watched it grow, watering it, caring for it, measuring, picking the fruit of the vine, knowing that's it our work that made this miracle happen.

We do carpentry, nailing boards together into designs, measuring them, making designs, writing all over them for posterity.

We send each other notes, room to room, getting the joy of receiving a response almost immediately. We dial relatives and friends on the telephone, with children reading the dial and making the telephone connection on their own.

We cut sandwiches into a variety of shapes and fold napkins into intricate fractions. In short, this house, this neighborhood, just like everyone else's, is a mecca for learning.

Last Friday was especially sweet. With the four year old, who has had some listening problems, we played Listen and Do. It's an old classic ever new. You give three or more directions. The child listens and then follows them: "Walk slowly to the kitchen. Pick up the kitchen towel. Bring it back, walking fast to the living room." Then we exchanged who gives directions. My grandson was delighted to tell me what to do and found that he had to

correct some of Grandma's mistakes.

With the six year old, we opened a big map. I am a great lover of maps and now he is too. Maps of the world and the USA hang at his house and in mine.

A map is one of the most remarkable teaching tools. With marker in his hand, we went from city to city, figuring out how far we traveled, what the map legend markings meant. He found the railroad that bordered the Mississippi.

This was a wonderful experience, not just because he was learning the intricacies of the map but because I felt this sense of passing on to him a joy about maps that I have always felt.

It was an intergenerational moment. I hope that there will be many more of them. In any event, I have to savor and use these now. The message is this: Give the gift of your time. Don't bother to go the store for one more toy. Save your money.

Bring yourself and your ideas. Pleasure and learning are right there in front of and around you. Create your magic moments. They don't come packaged in a box.

ABOUT THE WRITER

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