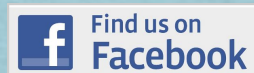


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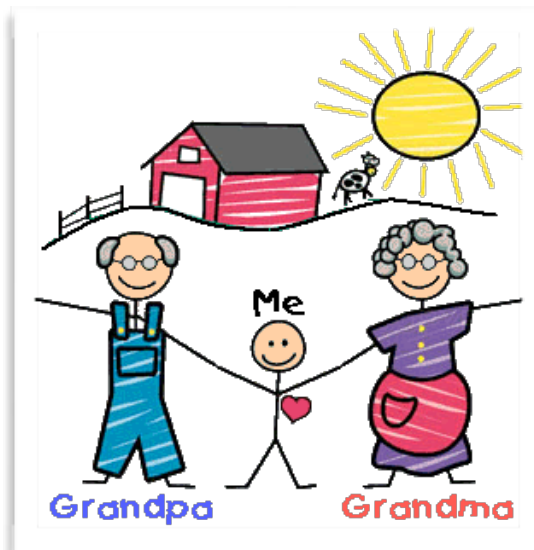
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TOM TOM ENGLISH



Are grandparents cash cows?

VOCABULARY

Harassed =

Feeling strained due to
too many demands

Fatigue =

Extreme tiredness

Understate =

To describe something
as being smaller or less
important that it really
is

Vulture =

A large bird that waits
for animals to die
before eating them

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. Do you think grandchildren are “a joy, pure and simple”? Why? Why not?
2. Can you relate to any of the comments in the article? Which ones?
3. Grandparents - do you spend a lot of time with your grandchildren? What do you do?
4. How about your own grandparents? Is/was your relationship different compared to the current generation? How was it different?
5. Parents - do you feel that you sometimes cause your parents to have “grandchildren fatigue”? How?

VOCABULARY

Demur =

Raise objections or show
reluctance

Entail =

Involve necessarily

Loaded =

Having lots of money

Primed =

Prepared, ready

If children are a joy and a responsibility, grandchildren are a joy pure and simple – an irresponsible joy. **Harassed** parents look forward to being grandparents. Grandchildren visit, stay long enough to make you feel young again and then go home, and their parents handle the stress. What's wrong with the above? Only one thing: it isn't true. Probably it never was. Last month Shukan Post ran a story on "grandchildren **fatigue**." It's not the little ones themselves who are demanding, of course, but their parents on their children's behalf. The report drew such a vast and eager response – "Me too!" "I feel the same way!" "So it's not just me!" "If anything Post **understates** the case!" – that the editorial decision was made to explore the problem more deeply.

Cash cows – that's what parents are to their grown children. **Vultures** – that's what grown children are to their parents. At least that's the impression you get reading the story.

"My son and my daughter often come over with their families to visit," says a 66-year-old retiree. "'Come over to visit' – how pleasant that sounds. In fact, it's more like blackmail."

The example he raises is comparatively trivial – the visitors won't settle for home cooking; they've come specially; why not go out to a restaurant? No, not kaiten zushi, a real restaurant – meaning an expensive one. We're not told how many grandchildren there are, only that the bill usually comes to tens of thousands of yen – no small sum for a pensioner, but if he **demurs**, perhaps they'll stop coming? Perhaps he'll lose all contact with the grandchildren?

A 70-year-old grandfather is always delighted to see his grandchildren, and the fact that his son's family doesn't stay with him and his wife but at a nearby onsen is not a bad arrangement either – except that the unspoken understanding is that grandpa and grandma cover the onsen hotel bill. Why? Well, just because. Call it custom. Again: to challenge it might mean the visits cease altogether.

It's not only meals and accommodation. Having children **entails** all kinds of expenses – medical, educational, supplementary (e.g. piano lessons) – and the assumption seems to have taken root that kids ultimately are not their parents' responsibility but their grandparents.

"My four-year-old granddaughter developed sick-house syndrome," says a 70-year-old retiree. "They had to move. But my son's just 30 – it was impossible on his salary." There went grandpa's life savings – 20 million yen. He'd been planning on using part of that to make his own home barrier-free. Now he and his wife are looking for part-time jobs.

Why don't more grandparents just say no?. Makiko Miyamoto offers an explanation: Young parents who grew up in an economic depression know their own parents lived and worked through Japan's bubble economy and think that they're **loaded**. The grandparents know that the current economy is hard, and they know too what hard times are, having gone through the early postwar years when poverty was rampant. They want to spare their grandchildren anything like that.

In short – one generation is **primed** to give and the other is primed to receive. It sounds perfect, doesn't it?