THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN GRANDFATHERS

RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN

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DEDICATION

It is with a great deal of humility and pride that I dedicate this dissertation to the ten
heroic men who participated in this research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pursuing doctoral studies and completing a dissertation was a road filled with many up and downs along the way. My personal journey was more like a scenic cruise in that it was a leisurely tour that spanned a period of nearly 10 years. During this time, I married my soul mate; took on a job at a major foundation; moved to a new home; lost my father following an extended illness; and welcomed the birth of a son, Elias Farrington. I am truly grateful for the strength I gained through every turn and bend I experienced.

God has endowed me with the gifts of family, friends, colleagues, and even critics—all of them are important to me, and all are necessary in making my life complete. I have especially appreciated my wife Adelpha’s support and encouragement, as well as her patience while I sometimes had to sacrifice time from her in order to meet the demands of my studies. Her fine editing skills were extremely useful toward the very end of the process.

I thank Dr. Gayle Cox who served as my advisor in the early years of my journey, and prior to her retirement from the IU School of Social Work. I will always envy the fact that she was able to jump ship before me! She has truly been a teacher, mentor, confidant, cheerleader, and a wonderful resource for imparting her knowledge about custodial grandparenting, as we both share a personal passion and professional interest about the subject.

Dr. Theresa Roberts and the local NABSW chapter members have been an extended spiritual family to me while serving as an informal support group made up of
my professional peers. Dr. Roberts’ soft manner and strong resolve make for the perfect balance in sharing her wisdom about African American research.

I also would like to honor the memory and legacy of my forebears: Percy L. Watson, Booker Payne and Milo Prim—the three grandfathers in my life. Each one was a giant in his own right and helped to shape me into the man, husband and father I am today.

Lastly, I have had the good fortune of being under the tutelage and direction of four exceptional men who were willing to serve on my doctoral committee: first and foremost, Dr. Robert Vernon as my chair; and Dean Michael Patchner; Dr. Sheldon Siegel and Dr. Roger Jarjoura. Each added a unique perspective for evaluating my work and seeing its potential. I am grateful for the time they gave to me, despite the competing demands that vied for their attention.
ABSTRACT

Michael R. Twyman

The Lived Experiences of African American Grandfathers Raising their Grandchildren

According to the most recent US Census statistics, there is an estimated 2.5 million grandparents raising their grandchildren in the United States without the children’s parents present in the household. In Indianapolis, the figure constitutes nearly 9,000 households. There are a disproportionately higher number of African American grandparents that are primary caregivers to their grandchildren. However, 6 percent of this population is grandfathers who are raising their grandchildren, while some 40 percent of the grandmothers are married.

The research is a compilation of interviews with ten African American grandfathers living in Indianapolis who were raising their grandchildren in their households without the presence of the grandchildren’s parents. These men were either married or widowed and have either formal custody of their grandchildren through adoption, foster care/kinship care, court-appointed guardianship or informal living arrangements. The objective of the research was to capture the lived experiences of these grandfathers who were fulfilling their caregiving roles. Thus, the research methodology used was reflective of the phenomenological paradigm of inquiry.

These interviews were conducted mostly in the homes of the grandfathers, or at their workplaces. Each interview was tape-recorded, using a question guide. The voice recordings were transcribed subsequently into written electronic text by a professional company. Themes about the grandparent caregiving role emerged from a coding process that dissected and analyzed each interview. These recurring themes were documented
and substantiated by grandfathers' quotes, and included the following dimensions: nature and quality of grandfather/grandchild relationships, formal and informal custody, spousal relationships, support systems and spirituality, parental involvement, discipline, school and extra-curricular activities/special needs, finances, health condition/mortality, housing/spatial relationships and personal time.

Given the richness and thick description of these grandfathers' private lives and the generous sharing of their roles as grandparent caregivers, suggestions for future research on the subject of custodial grandparenting were presented in the context of grandfathers particularly. This work may be especially beneficial to the social work field, as there is a dearth of literature on the role of grandfathers in family systems currently available.

Robert Vernon, PhD, Chair
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Across the country, more than six million children -- approximately 1 in 12 children -- are living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives. Indiana has more than 113,000 children living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives. In many of these households, grandparents and other relatives are the primary caregivers ("kinship caregivers") for children whose parents cannot or will not care for them due to substance abuse, illness and death, abuse and neglect, economic hardship, incarceration, divorce, domestic violence, and other family and community crises.

The data below show the numbers of grandparents who are living in households with at least one grandchild under the age of 18, as well as the numbers of grandparents who are the primary caregivers for these grandchildren.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Grandparents Living in Households with One or More Grandchildren Under 18</th>
<th>Grandparents Responsible for Meeting the Basic Needs of Grandchildren</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>5,771,671</td>
<td>2,426,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>96,169</td>
<td>48,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis city</td>
<td>15,152</td>
<td>8,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Wayne city</td>
<td>3,483</td>
<td>1,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary city</td>
<td>4,679</td>
<td>2,408</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There is significant amount of literature that suggests that custodial grandparenting is a rapidly growing phenomenon in the United States, especially for the
last 20 years since it has come to the attention of researchers. The number of grandparents raising their grandchildren without the presence or involvement of their grandchildren’s parents is definitely on the rise. There are a number of research studies on the topic, most of which focus on the difficulties that many of these grandparents and grandchildren face in attempting to carry out their roles in this type of family structure (Casper & Bryson, 2000; Minkler & Thomson, 1999; Szinovacz, 1998; Jendrek, 1994; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Bengston & Robertson, 1985).

Although there has been more attention given to the subject of grandparents raising grandchildren, there is still much more left unknown and undocumented. One such area is the role of the grandfathers, in particular, in these families, as most of the existing literature centers around grandmothers. The fact that the majority of the custodial grandparents are single, African American women may give rise to this emphasis. Just the same, a significant number of these grandmothers are married (roughly a third according to Casper & Bryson, 2000), and there are about 6 percent of grandfathers serving as sole/primary caregivers to their grandchildren.

**Grandparent Caregivers and Households with Grandparents Present**

The United States 2000 Census reported that, of the nearly 160 million people aged 30 and over living in households in the United States, almost 6 million or 3.6 percent were co-resident grandparents. Co-resident parents are defined as grandparents living with grandchildren younger than 18 years of age. Of these numbers, 2.4 million or 42 percent (nearly half) were also grandparent caregivers. These caregivers had primary responsibility for their grandchildren younger than 18. Nearly 40 percent had cared for their grandchildren for five or more years (Bryson & Casper, 2000). However, these
statistics do not begin to reveal the number of households where the grandparent is essentially still the primary caregiver even when at least one parent may live in the home but has little to nothing to do with raising the children. These informal care arrangements are quite common and many of them probably escape counting as such in the census data on households.

While eight percent each of the Black, American Indiana and Alaska Native, and Hispanic populations aged 30 and over live with grandchildren, Hispanics are less likely than Blacks or American Indians and Alaska Natives to be caregivers to these grandchildren: 35 percent compared to 52 percent and 56 percent, respectively. Asian co-resident grandparents are least likely to be responsible for their grandchildren. It could be inferred from these data that Asian and Hispanic grandparents are less likely to be the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, despite their living in multigenerational households mainly resulting from common cultural norms (Bryson & Casper, 2000). This is an interesting distinction in that a multigenerational household should in no way be considered the same as one headed by a grandparent, even when care for the children may be shared by more adults than just the parents.

Also in this study, all of the grandfathers were raising their grandchildren without their parent currently residing in the home. The multigenerational household too has been common in Black families, but perhaps less so now since many of the children’s parents are maintaining separate households, are institutionalized, unaccounted for, or in some cases, deceased. In almost all of the cases in this study, the mothers had been determined to be unfit to raise their children based on a number of reasons, but including being drug
addicted, negligent or unwilling. Thus, in some instances, a court of law had determined parents' absence.

Among grandparent caregivers, 12 percent care for grandchildren for fewer than 6 months; 11 percent for six to 11 months; 23 percent for one to two years; 15 percent for three to four years; and 39 percent for five years or more (US Census, 2000). Of the 10 grandfathers interviewed in this research study, the majority of them have been caring for a grandchild for at least 6 years, and several have done so for more than 10 years. Of the three that had been providing care to their grandchildren for a year or less, all responded to a recent crisis or sudden decision.

In 2000, 3.5 million co-resident grandparents were younger than 60, while 2.3 million were aged 60 and over. Co-resident grandparents who were younger than 60 were more likely to be caring for their grandchildren (50 percent) than co-resident grandparents who were aged 60 and over (31 percent). It is also worth noting that a greater percentage of grandparent caregivers aged 60 and over have cared for their grandchildren for five years or more (55 percent) than those younger than 60 (32 percent). Regionally, the South and Northeast have the highest percentages responsible for five years (about 40 percent). In the District of Columbia, it was 53 percent.

In the study, the average age of the grandfather is 63, with the oldest being 77 and the youngest at 53. The 77-year-old also has his grandchildren in his care the longest: 19 years for his grandson and 17 years for his twin grandson and granddaughter, as he and his wife have cared for them in their home since they were born. It has been quite a while since the mother has lived in the same home, and even when she did, she was not
their primary caregiver. Additionally, the average length of care for all of the 
grandfathers is around 6 years.

Geographically speaking, the state of Hawaii has the highest percentage of 
grandparents living with grandchildren (7 percent), while North Dakota has the lowest 
(1.3 percent). However, the South has the highest percentage of grandparent caregivers 
(48 percent), while the Northeast had the lowest (34 percent). At the state level, the 
highest percentages of grandparent caregivers are about 55 to 59 percent, with Oklahoma 
and Wyoming among the highest (US Census, 2000).

In general, the age distribution for grandparent caregivers is younger than that of 
co-resident grandparents not responsible for grandchildren. Seven percent of grandparent 
caregivers are ages 30 to 39, whereas 35 percent are aged 50 to 59, and only one percent 
are 80 and over. Moreover, the vast majority (94 percent) of grandparent caregivers are 
either the householders or the spouse of the householder. In addition, 34 percent of the 
grandparent caregivers are householders or spouses who are living with their 
grandchildren without the presence of the parents of their grandchildren. This is the case 
of all the grandfathers interviewed in the study, and in several cases the father of the 
grandchild is unknown or out of contact.

The Census 2000 also reveals that on average, 19 percent of grandparents have 
incomes below the poverty level in the United States in 1999. While not a direct 
comparison, only 14 percent of families with related children were are living in poverty. 
The proportion of grandparent caregivers living in poverty is highest in the South (21 
percent), and in some southern states, the number is as high as 30 percent.
African American Population in General

So what are the growing trends of African Americans in the United States? Recent census statistics show that the numbers of this ethnic minority continues to grow. However, the Hispanic population in the United States is on a much more dramatic increase. Of the total US population in 2000, 36.4 million, or almost 13 percent, report themselves as Black or African American. The 1990 Census shows that there are 30 million Blacks in the United States. Using the Black alone population in 2000 shows an increase of 4.7 million people, or 15.6 percent, in the total Black population between 1990 and 2000.

In addition, according to the 2000 Census, of all the respondents classified themselves as African American or Black, 54 percent live in the South, 19 percent live in the Midwest, 18 percent live in the Northeast, and 10 percent live in the West. The South has the largest Black population, as well as the highest proportion of Blacks in the total population. In fact, ten states in the South has Black populations over one million, and when combined, they represent 47 percent of the Black population in the country. In Indiana, the Black population in 2000 is 432,092, which constitutes 7.8 percent of the total state population.

Concentrations of Blacks in the Midwest and West tend to be in counties located within metropolitan areas or in counties containing higher education institutions, or military bases or both. This is true of cities like Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, South Bend and Gary--all in Indiana. Metropolitan concentrations tend to be in counties containing older central cities. Although Blacks are not as concentrate in Mid-Western counties, such as around Chicago, Gary, Indiana and Detroit, Blacks comprise a sizeable
proportion of the population. New York and Chicago account for nine percent of the total Black population in the United States. Among places of 100,000 or more population, the highest proportion of Blacks is in Gary, Indiana with 85 percent, followed by Detroit with 83 percent. Again, most Blacks are still concentrated in the Southern region of the United States, despite their high numbers in select Midwestern and Northeastern cities (Bryson & Casper, 2000).

**Extended Families in the African American Community**

Just the same, multigenerational and blended families are nothing new to African Americans as a race. Many researchers maintain that the African American extended family can be easily traced to the African heritage of most Blacks in the United States. The idea of a kinship network or multigenerational household traveled with slavery to America, as many newly married couples entered into a larger extended family (Hill, 1992).

According to Wilson (1986), more Black than White adults have family members other than their own children living in their households, and African American parents see more kin during the week and consider them more involved in the lives of children than White families. Stevens (1984) findings suggest that Black grandmothers in the households of Black teenagers with children help protect the babies from the negative influence of overwhelmed, inexperienced mothers who struggle to rear their children. Likewise, adolescent mothers who live in extended families are more likely to complete high school and get a job and less likely to be dependent on public assistance versus those mothers who live on their own (Furstenberg & Crawford, 1978). It is also believed that African American extended families transmit Black cultural values to children by placing
more emphasis on cooperation, as well as moral and spiritual values (Tolson & Wilson, 1990).

Ruiz (1999) maintains there is still little to no empirical research on African American grandmothers who are primary caregivers of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren despite the dramatic increase in grandparent-headed households. Over the past decade, the crack-cocaine epidemic, the spread of HIV/AIDS and incarceration have all contributed to the dramatic increase in the prevalence of surrogate parenting by African American grandmothers. As the problems escalate, this trend of custodial grandparenting is likely to continue. To this end, Burton and DeVries (1993) report that African American grandparents, in general, see their roles as necessary for the survival of the family and future generations.

Burton and DeVries (1993) further fin that African American grandmothers do not always feel that their roles are gratifying, as some grandparents express dismay because they feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities of providing care for their grandchildren, including childcare, school, job related issues and emotional and health problems. Moreover, many grandmothers feel that they do not have time for themselves and are often socially isolated and lacking in social support.

Other psychological issues of custodial grandmothers include feelings of guilt and shame because of the drug or alcohol use of their children. Additionally, raising grandchildren with special needs, (US Senate Special Committee on Grandparents, 1992; Brown and Monye, 1995; Burton, 1992; Minkler and Roe, 1993) as well as caring for teenagers (Kee, 1997), have their own unique set of challenges. These often add to the social and psychological stress that African American grandmothers may experience.
Ruiz’s work (1993) points to many of the problems of grandmothers assuming the custodial role for their grandchildren while confronting the limitations of relevant research on the African American grandmother population. In her attempt to bring light to grandmothers, she neglects the opportunity to acknowledge African American grandfathers. It seems more appropriate to look at both grandmothers and grandfathers in the context of a larger family context.

Significant increases have occurred in the number of children in the United States living in grandparent-maintained households regardless of the presence or absence of the grandchildren’s parents. Between 1970 and 1992, these increases are most evident in cases where there is only one parent. However, between 1992 and 1997, the greatest growth occurs among grandchildren living with their grandparents with no parent present. This is often called “skipped generation” households or living arrangements (Bryson & Casper, 1999).

Characteristics of grandparents and grandchildren are likely to differ depending on whether the grandparent or parent actually maintains the home. For instance, grandparents who maintain their own homes are more likely to be economically independent than their counterparts who are living in the children’s homes.

In 1997, 2.9 million grandmothers lived with their grandchildren compared with only 1.7 million grandfathers. Thus, 63 percent of co-resident grandparents are grandmothers. The authors suggest that there might be several reasons why co-resident grandmothers outnumber the grandfathers; these include the higher mortality of men; women living longer, and thus are more likely to have grandchildren (and great-grandchildren). Furthermore, women are less likely than men to remarry after the death
of a spouse, and thus are less likely to be widowed, as well as desirous of living with other family members for companionship purposes. Other reasons include the fact that older women are more likely to be poor than older couples or older men. Furthermore, cultural norms may dictate that women may be more inclined to assume caregiving roles than men, rendering many grandmothers in a position to help with their grandchildren in time of need or crisis (Bryson & Casper, 1999).

In 1997, Bryson and Casper found that in grandparent-maintained households, only 15 percent of the grandmothers are older than 65, while 21 percent of the grandfathers are 65 and older. In households maintained by the grandparents, nearly 35 percent of both grandmothers and grandfathers are in “excellent” or “very good” health; while in parent-maintained households the percentage is lower (about 27 percent). The research study did not focus much on the grandfather’s health condition, other than self-reports that range from very good to fair. However, a couple of grandfathers had chronic diseases, though not to the point that they are necessarily disabled or immobile.

Grandparent-maintained households are more likely to have grandparents who are still in the labor force. Seventy-two percent of the grandfathers and 56 percent of the grandmothers in these types of homes were employed in 1996, compared to 33 percent and 24 percent respectively in parent-maintained households. It may be that grandparents in grandparent-maintained families tend to be younger and less likely to have reached retirement age (Bryson & Casper, 1997). Most of the grandfathers in this research study were either retired or semi-retired. In most cases, the wife was still employed, however.

Single grandmothers are most likely to be poor. For example, when compared to grandfathers, grandmothers are twice as likely to be living in poverty, 21 percent
compared to 12 percent. The worst-case financial scenario for a grandparent is when neither a parent of the child or a grandfather is present in the home. Of these, grandmothers are likely to be poor; and the majority are Black (Bryson & Casper, 1999).

Data Specific to Grandchildren

Grandchildren who live in their grandparents’ homes are more than twice as likely to be non-Hispanic Black compared to grandchildren in households maintained by their parents, 36 percent versus 15 percent. While half of the grandchildren living in the homes of their grandparents are under the age of six, only about one-third of those in parent-maintained homes fall into this age group (Bryson & Casper, 1999).

Most of the grandchildren living in grandparent-maintained households can be found in the South and are less likely to live in the suburbs when compared to their counterparts. This latter fact may be due to the disproportionate number of Blacks that live in the South (and where this arguably is a long-standing tradition of multigenerational households).

Of all children under the age of 18, one in five live in a poor family compared to one in four co-resident grandchildren. Twenty-seven percent of the children living in their grandparents’ households are in poverty. However, those living with just a grandmother have a poverty rate of 63 percent (Bryson & Casper, 1999). Again, having an adult male in the household dramatically improves the financial status of these families. This fact seemed to ring true with the families represented in this study, as none of the grandfathers expressed any serious financial concerns resulting from the additional responsibility of caring for their grandchildren.
The National Center for Health Statistics (Saluter, 1996) reports that 3.735 million children under the age of 18 (5.4 percent) live in the home of their grandparent or grandparents, and that Black children are more likely (13 percent) to live with a grandparent than White children (3.9 percent) or Hispanic children (5.7 percent) (Pebley & Rudkin, 1992).

While nearly half the grandparent households with a grandchild include the child's mother, about a million families in the United States are made up of grandparents raising their grandchildren without one of the children's parents. About one in 20 children under 18 live in a home headed by a grandparent without parents present. Grandparents serving as surrogate parents represent all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Most families headed by grandparents live in an urban setting and have less than a high school education, and more such families live in the south (57 percent) than in all other areas of the United States combined (Takas, 1995).

Of the four million children living with their grandparents, 2.5 million live in three-generation households. Nearly 1.5 million live in split-generation households. The proportion of all grandchildren living in three-generation households, 3.6 percent, has been steady in recent years. The proportion in split-generation households, 2.1 percent, has risen slightly in recent years, after declining from 1940 through the 1980s (Pebley & Rudkin, 1992).

Younger children are more likely to live with their grandparents. More than 10 percent of children under the age of two live with their grandparents; 3 percent of children 15 to 17 years old do so. The frequency of three-generation households is much higher for younger children than for older children. Split-generation households are
about equally common for all ages. The differences by age in three-generation households likely reflect parents returning “home” during a transition of young adulthood (e.g., divorce, new child) (Pebley & Rudkin, 1992).

**African American Children**

African American children are more likely to live with their grandparents. Of all African American children, 7.8 percent live in three-generation households, and 5.7 percent live without their parents in split-generation households. Black grandmothers historically have played a more important role than white grandmothers have in childrearing and maintaining extended family stability. Higher minority-family coreidence may also reflect higher poverty rates for minority families (Pebley & Rudkin, 1992).

Approximately 4.5 million grandparents, or 9.8 percent, head a grandparent-grandchild household at any one time. The number of grandparents and grandchildren who have ever lived together at any point in their lives is higher, since many grandchildren live with grandparents for a relatively short time (US Census Bureau, 2000).

According to Hill (1999), one of the most important sources of mobility in African American families has been strong kinship networks. According to conventional wisdom, the extended family has declined sharply in urban areas. However, research studies continue to reveal that the proportion of Black extended families continued to increase during the 1970s and 1980s. Between 1970 and 1980, Black extended-family households rose from 23 percent to 28 percent. In 1990, two out of five black households were three-generational.
Hill (1999) suggests that there is a vital need to understand the wide range of support services provided by kinship networks, as African-American extended families often reach beyond a household and may include significant persons who are not related by blood or marriage. In fact, about two-fifths of working African Americans depend on responsible relatives for day-care services at moderate costs.

The informal adoption of children has been a major support in African American families since antiquity. This is most often manifest by grandparents or aunts and uncles taking in grandchildren or nieces and nephews to live with them for short or long periods. Consequently, the number of informally adopted children living with relatives has risen sharply among African American families over the past two decades. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of all Black children living in the households of kin rose from 1.3 million (or 13 percent) to 1.6 million (or 16 percent).

According to Ruiz (1999), there is currently little research on the issues facing African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Not much is known about the incidence and prevalence of this population, and that studies on this general subject do not include a sufficient number of African American grandparents. I would further argue that the literature fails to reference the presence and/or contributions of African American grandfathers at all. This overlooked population adds to the existing void in available research resources when studying and discussing this phenomenon in the context of family roles and family functioning.
CHAPTER II

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

Research Sample

As was outlined in the research proposal, the study sample includes ten African American grandfathers raising their grandchildren in their homes without the presence of the grandchildren’s parents in their household. The grandfathers could have been married, single or divorced and be related to the grandchild biologically, or through the adoption of the grandchild’s parent. Individuals had to meet the specific criteria in order to participate in this research study. All grandfathers were living in Indianapolis at the time of the interviews. The interview sessions were completed over a six-month period and were most often conducted in the homes of the respondents, with the exception of two that occurred at the respondents’ places of employment. I was familiar with only one of the respondents and our past association was solely professional.

Recruitment and Identification

The grandfathers were identified and referred to me through professional contacts (also known as “gatekeepers” in qualitative research) in the community who knew of men who fit the research participant criteria. These contacts included colleagues and associates working in the field of education, social services and government. The role of the gatekeepers/liaisons was critical because it was these persons who made the referrals to me, and which first established a prospective respondent’s interest and a level of trust and comfort in submitting to an interview. It is worth noting that my professional contacts’ list was comprised as many as 30 individual names, and I made direct contact with approximately 20 of them to produce the ten respondents (also known as research
participants) that constitute the study group. Also, there were five grandfathers who were referred to me for potential participation in the study but were eliminated for not meeting the specified participant criteria following a telephone pre-interview, (i.e. one grandfather could not substantiate that the grandchild’s parent was not living in the household, and the other was only providing part-time/summer care to his grandchildren). Also, there were two grandfathers that expressed a willingness to participate in an interview but did not fulfill their commitment for reasons unknown.

Procedures

Per approved Indiana University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines for this study, all ten participants signed a consent form and were fully apprised of their rights and given the opportunity to review the interview guide questions prior to the start of the interviews. Additionally, the personal information form, which can be found in the appendices, was also shared prior to the interview, and each was given an opportunity to seek clarity or explanation from me about the study. The personal information form asked basic demographic and individual profile questions relevant to the study, including age, marital status, number of children, income, number of grandchildren in care, length of care provided, and so forth. Reciprocity was granted to the grandfathers in the form of a $50 gift certificate to a retailer of their choice within a few days following the final interview.

Audio-Taping and Transcription

All interviews were audio-taped and then later professionally transcribed by a local company and submitted to me as electronic files. The company was under obligation to keep all information confidential; a privacy protection statement was
included in the contractual agreement provided to me when the tapes were submitted. The original tapes were returned to me following transcription and remain in my possession. The full, unedited transcripts appear in the appendices. Transcript references in the data analysis chapter have been slightly edited in order to have better reading clarity within the context of the narrative theme development.

According to IRB procedures, all respondents’ names remain anonymous in the printed text, and other references to specific people and places have been removed in those cases that would suggest any revealing of a respondent’s identity, or cast any maligning of a person, place or thing. For example, several respondents made specific references to an institution (school, hospital, social service agency, etc.), or a particular person (doctor, teacher, social worker, etc.) by name. This was expected given the nature of the interviews and the level of trust that was established during the tapings. Most of these references have been replaced however with “XXXX’s” as way of disguising the original words.

Research Framework

The study integrates both phenomenological and narrative inquiry paradigm approaches. The phenomenological paradigm (which, by definition, is aimed at providing interpretation and meaning to a particular phenomenon through a process called bracketing or coding), is reflected in the eleven themes that are illuminated in the Data Analysis chapter. Simply stated, the overall objective is to gain first-hand perspectives of the grandfathers about their impressions and experiences of being a primary caregiver to their grandchildren. The narrative inquiry component of the study focuses on interweaving the respondents’ verbatim responses (hence some comments do
not appear in proper grammar) and quotes into the body of the analysis chapter to both
illustrate as well as to validate each theme. This creates a narrative account for each of
the respondents that include a great deal of detail of their experiences, told from their
own unique perspectives.

**Phenomenological Approach Explained**

Phenomenology is a research method rooted in the 20th century movement
dedicated to describing the structures of experience as they present themselves to the
consciousness, without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumptions from other
disciplines such as natural history (Lester, 1999). The founder of phenomenology is
credited as the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who published work on this subject
in the early 1900s (Giorgi, 1970; Moustakas, 1990).

It is sometimes linked to Hermeneutics which examines lived experience, but with
an emphasis on the political, historical, and social context in which it is located. In this
case of phenomenological inquiry, the researcher is interactive with the participants in an
*interpretive* manner that consists of a series of planned actions.

The phenomenological approach also includes the following:

- Experiences are recorded as text that are then segmented into elements (themes)
  by the researcher

- Informative and telling segments of the experience are then identified, and

- Re-integrated into a descriptive narrative to convey the life experience to the
  reader

To paraphrase Stan Lester (1999), the purpose of the phenomenological research
is to illuminate the specific experience and identify how phenomena are perceived by the
actors in a particular situation. In the human sphere, this usually translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s). Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual so that the researcher learns through not only listening to first-hand accounts but also by giving an interpretation to the meaning of what is shared.

Phenomenological and associated approaches can be applied to single cases or to selected samples, the latter applies to this research study. In multiple-participant research, the strength of inference which can be made increases rapidly once factors start to recur with more than one participant (Lester, 1999). This point is strongly illustrated in the data analysis chapter which uses multiple respondent examples to describe and relate the themes identified from the group’s responses. This also aids in establishing a level of validity in this study, as so many of the respondent’s comments are similar to others made by fellow group members, despite each interview being conducted separately, and with persons who did not know each other for the most part. Lester (1999) believes it is important to distinguish between statistical and qualitative validity, as phenomenological research can be robust in indicating the presence of factors and their effects in individual cases, but must be especially cautious in suggesting their extent in relation to the population from which the participants or cases are drawn (Lester, 1999).

A variety of methods can be used in phenomenologically-based research. These may include interviews, conversations, participant observation, action research, focus meetings and analysis of personal texts. The establishment of a good level of rapport and
empathy is highly essential to gaining a depth of information, particularly when investigating issues where a participant has a strong personal stake.

One bi-product of phenomenological research is that it generates a large quantity of interview notes, tape recordings, jottings or other records all of which have to be collected and analyzed, according to Lester (1999). Analysis is also necessarily disorganized in the beginning, as aggregate data do not tend to fall neatly into definitive categories, as well as there can be numerous ways of linking between different parts of discussions or observations (Lester, 1999). The raw data definitely begin to take shape as the themes emerge and are identified through the coding process. My research definitely found these assertions to be true, but having done past research using coding techniques made this task more manageable.

Phenomenological studies make detailed comments about individual situations that do not lend themselves to direct generalization in the same way that is sometimes claimed for survey research. Thus, the development of general theories (i.e. which apply to situations beyond the participants or cases which have been studied) from phenomenological findings needs to be done transparently if it is to have validity. In fact, the reader should be able to work from the findings to the theories and see how the researcher has arrived at his or her interpretations (Lester, 1999). My interpretations lead me to affirm my beliefs that the theoretical construct of “resiliency” plays a major role in the lives of these grandfathers and their families. This theory has been raised in the literature review as a potential underpinning for why and how these families are coping with their day-to-day lives. In every case, the grandparent is faced with a difficult decision regarding their grandchild’s care due to an unfortunate and/or unforeseen
circumstance that precludes the grandchild’s parents from being able to care for their own children. Despite all the challenges that these grandparents face, all in all, these men are still assuming and sharing the role of caregivers in order to best provide for and protect the grandchildren involved.

The reader should easily notice that my approach to this study strongly mirrors the techniques of phenomenological research as it is explained here. Donald Ratcliffe (1995) is a highly respected researcher that has written extensively on approaches to conducting qualitative studies with rigor and credibility. I find his thoughts to be the clearest about practical ways to achieve validity and reliability in undertaking research from a phenomenological perspective. By contrast, quantitative research offers significantly more on these subjects as most concepts and measures of validity and reliability are standard and well developed for conducting that type of research.

Ratcliff’s guidance on validity and reliability further builds upon Cosraro’s (1981) work on how to incorporate field notes, personal notes and methodology notes and theoretical notes, which I will speak about later, into developing an appropriate framework for producing accurate and quality reporting from interview research.

I subscribe to Ratcliff’s (1995) instruction for both establishing sound validity and reliability in my research methodology. Summarized below are ways that these may be achieved in qualitative research in general:

Divergence from initial expectations --by referring to personal notes kept from the beginning to see how the data has pushed one from initial assumptions.

Convergence with other sources of data --using variation kinds of triangulation and comparisons with the literature.
Extensive quotations --drawing from field notes, transcripts of interviews, other notes

Other research data--such as archival data, recordings (video or audio).

Independent checks/multiple researchers --having more than one person involved in the research of those studied; team research approach or other sources of verification.

Member check --requiring the researcher returns to the participants at the completion of the study and asks them if one is accurate or needs correction/elaboration on constructs, hypotheses, etc.

He further asserts that reliability may be accomplished through repeating the same steps or functions or doing the same activity by different persons. These are simply stated as:

Multiple viewings of videotape--by same person or different people.

Multiple listenings of audio tape--by same person or different people.

Multiple transcriptions of audio tape--by same person or different people.

Ratcliff (1995) offers an insightful caution by suggesting that high reliability may suggest a systematic bias at work in data, a bias shared by multiple researchers or across observations by the same researcher. This is why many qualitative researchers emphasize validity rather than reliability; documenting what occurs in an accurate manner may reveal inconsistencies. Reality is dynamic; it changes constantly. But it is important to realize that low reliability could be consistent with high validity if the social situation is constantly in flux, or people might see things differently because they are seeing different aspects, different levels, and different perspectives, of the whole which is far more complex than any single perspective/person might see.
Putting two different accounts together might result in a better understanding of the whole than either one separately, even though the consistency between those accounts might be rather low. Together, the two very different accounts—reflecting low reliability—could produce even higher validity (Ratcliff, 1995). In my case, the individual responses of the grandfathers have very similar themes. Many of their challenges, joys, frustrations, hopes and dreams are common among them, despite their life situations and circumstances being uniquely different. It is this point that helps to achieve a high level of validity among the study group and serves as a good source for identifying the themes. In many cases, the respondents use slightly different language or words but often convey many of the same messages.

The fact that these ten study respondents might answer differently today than at the time of the interview for a number of reasons can be easily attributed to the ever-changing lives and the lives of their families. In fact, these potential differences will only increase as time goes on and the grandfathers’ progress beyond how they perceive the phenomenon of custodial grandparenting. The same could be said for respondents reacting differently to a particular theme or dimension already expressed if put under a different set of circumstances, e.g. another researcher. This may mean that another researcher may come away with slightly (or even dramatically) different responses is not out of the realm of possibility. What is more important to me is that the transcripts accurately capture the participants’ responses, and that my interpretations of what they share are a true reflection of the essence of what has been communicated. I believe I accomplish both objectives.
One of the first exercises I performed while still developing the research proposal was to document my personal expectations and assumptions about what I might possibly anticipate encountering while interviewing the study respondents. Most of the opinions that I had formed were a result of previous work in the topical area of custodial grandparenting and what I had gleaned from relevant literature over the last five years or so. In many instances what the respondents share was what I would have expected; however, in a number of cases I was introduced to new and slightly different insights on familiar issues.

Secondly, during the interviews I took many personal notes, to the extent that it was appropriate (without being counterproductive to the process), of comments that struck me as particularly significant, unusual or instructive. I paid special attention to key words and phrases that either expressed a specific emotion or feeling, terms that were used repetitively, and even body language, voice inflection, and other affective behavior as the respondents described their experiences. I used the interview guide (also included as Appendix A) as an instrument to jot these notes down so that many comments could be easily attributed to a specific question, even though they were more than likely to be revealed later on the audio-tape and its subsequent transcription.

Thirdly, immediately following each interview, I retreated in isolation for a considerable period to mentally process what I had heard and experienced during my time with the respondent. This was not only important for keeping the material fresh in my head, but it also helped me to decompress my own feelings and emotions that had been evoked through our exchanges. This cathartic process was followed by me writing a summary digest of the major highlights of the interview, focusing both on the content of
the interview as well as pinpointing any unique attributes of the grandfather or his situation that were distinctive of other respondents. Doing this gave me a foundation for coding the transcript data, which came later. It also facilitated the creation of the biographical summaries of each of the respondents, which are also included in the Appendices for the reader’s quick reference.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I reviewed the electronic and hard-copy transcripts of each respondent a minimum of three to four times before engaging in any coding of the data. This was done for reliability purposes and helped to bring clarity and accuracy to processing the data and ultimately developing the themes. Additionally, I provided a hard-copy transcript to each of the respondents and asked that they review them to ensure that they reflected what they had communicated. In following-up with respondents, I queried three of them specifically about missing words or incomplete thoughts that were not included in the transcript but may have been critical to understanding a point. There were few cases of this, as most of any missing information of the transcript was due to the respondent’s comments not being audible, but rarely did this rise to the level of not being able to comprehend the more general statement. The general process described is often referred to as a “member check” in qualitative research and it was key to achieving validity for the data collection and analysis.

Another way of accomplishing this objective is to have the respondents to verify the researcher’s interpretations of what they have shared. This means that the each respondent would be given the opportunity to review the coding themes and the specific references to his comments as cited in the data analysis chapter. This was not however a practical or reasonable proposition given the logistical constraints, potential lack of
interest and willingness of the respondents to do so, and my ability to get further access to them beyond what had already been a significant investment of their time with me.

Conversely, I sought to overcome this issue by making certain to summarize, and sometimes, repeat, what I heard by redirecting comments to the respondents during the course of the interview. Also, I used very specific respondent quotations from the transcripts when interpreting the data, especially when discussing a particular theme. The latter especially helped to validate why a theme had emerged as an identified issue, while decreasing subjectivity on the researcher’s part about how or why a theme had been selected.

Furthermore, I introduced each theme with any relevant references to the professional literature, which served as a framework for relating the respondent’s comments to an even broader context. This allowed me to readily illuminate any similarities or contradictions that the participants’ responses had with what has already been documented on the same issue/theme. This method of comparison between more than one source is referred to as triangulation in research of this type.

This leads to the issue of generalizability. As previously stated, the common themes suggest that there is a great deal of congruence among the ten interviews, even though there are unique perspectives to each theme in any one respondent case. It is, however, reasonable to surmise that many of the comments shared in this study might be similar to other custodial grandparents, especially as it relates to basic issues like living/housing arrangements, parental involvement, and custody matters and the child welfare system, which tend to be fairly generic in nature when studying any family or household where the grandparent is raising a grandchild. On the other hand, issues such
as the quality of the grandfather/grandchild relationship, spousal relationships, health and finances may be more applicable to persons similarly situated, as these issues are often idiosyncratic and are arguably influenced by a greater number of confounding variables.

It is clear that the grandfather’s role is distinctive to that of the grandmother according to many of the respondents’ comments about how they view their relationships with their grandchildren and their responsibilities in providing care. Therefore, it is also probable that many of the respondents’ experiences and perspectives would not necessarily be expressed in nearly the same way by a respondent’s grandchild’s grandmother. Hence, why seeking and capturing the voice of grandfathers was so important to understanding the custodial grandparenting phenomenon through their lenses, something that previous research has not played an effective role in fulfilling.

Also, some nuances in the themes noted in this research may be culturally- or racially- biased (we can already assume that they are gender-biased), and thus certain comments and experiences may be more applicable to the African American experiences, versus other groups of custodial grandparents, or more specifically, grandfathers. The same could be said for income, despite their being some range within this group of ten, with low, middle-income to a higher, middle-income households represented.

The concluding chapter on suggestions for future research offers more detail on how further exploration of certain issues might best help to test their level of generalizability of this study’s findings are to other grandparents raising their grandchildren found in the overall population. Finally, what is most compelling among all of the ten grandfathers is how each of them exhibits a high degree of resiliency by assuming their caregiving roles, regardless of their individual circumstances. And in all
cases, the grandparents are essentially rescuing their grandchildren from being in an unfavorable situation. The fact that each grandfather is making such tremendous sacrifices on behalf of their families by raising their grandchildren is an overarching and all-encompassing theme. The likelihood that this is true of thousands of other custodial grandparents may be highly based on what we already know and have heard. Many take on this role simply because they feel it is the best thing for their children and families as a whole. Lastly, many seem to make it work and would view the arrangement as positive overall, notwithstanding the existing research's heightened and almost exclusive focus on the challenges and problems associated with this role.
CHAPTER III

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

As anticipated, the interviews generated a number of recurring themes based on the
grandfathers' various responses. Several of the themes are consistent with what had been
raised in the dissertation proposal based on my past practice experience with African
American families. However, most of the themes are ones that have been addressed in
the scholarly literature to some degree or another, but a few nuances are newly noted.
This may be a result of such few accounts of grandfathers’ roles in the family
documented in contemporary or historical research findings.

Naturally, some of the themes that surfaced may have been influenced by the
specific questions asked that were designed to uncover one’s thoughts and feelings on a
particular subject. Notwithstanding this, the questions were intentionally structured to be
open-ended in most cases such to illicit a deep breadth of varying responses. Thus, the
level of candor and intensity of the responses highly reflect how a particular issue may
have or have not resonated with the grandfather and his specific situation.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I carefully reviewed the material and assigned
theme codes to the relative text, as described in the Methodology section of the
dissertation. A total of 11 major themes are identified; they are briefly highlighted
below. Each theme is then further depicted by citing relevant literature references, as
well as using selected comments from the grandfathers to better illustrate how the themes
are expressed and to what level they coincide, or do not coincide, with existing research
on custodial grandparents.
Theme Descriptions Summarized

A- Nature and quality of grandparent/grandchild relationship
B- Formal and informal custody
C- Spousal relationships
D- Support systems/spirituality
E- Parental involvement/contact
F- Discipline
G- School and extra-curricular involvement/special needs
H- Finances
I- Health condition/mortality
J- Housing/spatial arrangements
K- Personal time
A-Nature and quality of grandparent/grandchild relationships

Many grandparents find meaning and satisfaction in being able to provide stability and security for a grandchild (Jendrek, 1996). Whereas the types of relationships that grandfather caregivers have with their grandchildren naturally vary according to the respondents, there is a great deal of pride, joy and satisfaction expressed about these relationships, overall. With the exception of one question that asks how the grandfather would characterize his relationship with the grandchildren in his care, most of the respondents’ comments were freely offered through a variety of statements about the quality of relationship with their grandchildren, both as they see it and how they think their grandchildren might depict the relationship. Although Jendrek’s (1996) research on the difficulties of grandparents caring for their grandchildren, there are also benefits according to many of these caregivers. According to Jendrek, a majority of caregiving grandparents report experiencing a greater purpose for living. Providing care to their grandchildren helps some caregivers to feel young and active.

Research by Burton, et al., (1995) also includes rewards such as a chance to raise a child differently, to nurture family relationships, continue family histories and to receive love and companionship from their grandchild (p. 353). To many of the grandparents raising their grandchildren, their sacrifices are more than worth it.

Grandparents may become isolated from other members of the family who may resent the role that they have taken on. A case in point may be other grandchildren who may feel some jealousy in their perception that the grandchild in the grandparents’ home is being favored. Grandparenting and parenting roles traditionally differ widely in the kinds and levels of responsibility involved. Grandparents cannot be “grandparents” to

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the child who is under their care when they are parenting that child, and this may cause role confusion in the family (Kleiner, Hertzog & Targ, 1998).

Some research suggests that living with a relative, rather than with a non-relative or in an institution, may minimize this effect by providing the child with a sense of family support (Dubowitz et al., 1994). Furthermore, many grandparents find meaning and satisfaction in being able to provide stability and security for a grandchild (Jendrek, 1996).

By desire or default, it is evident from all of the respondents that they are taking an active role in the raising of their grandchildren, as well as each one of them is able to define and articulate a relationship separate and apart from ones that the grandchildren may have with other family members, including their parents. Furthermore, most of the comments center on communication issues, especially complicated by age difference, but perhaps typical of what a relationship might often be between a parent and child. Clearly, most of the grandfathers in this study demonstrated that they are very “hands-on” and have many stories about why their relationships with the grandchildren in their care are especially meaningful and satisfying.

This particular theme also encompasses what the primary reason is or motivation that leads the grandparent in accepting the care responsibility for the grandchild in the first place. In many ways, it is obvious that the origins or causes of the living and care arrangements help to define, and to a great extent dictate, the nature and overall quality of the grandparent/grandchild relationship. For example, when the grandfather is essentially rescuing the grandchild from an abusive or neglectful parent or situation, which was often the case, the grandfather’s desire to provide a safe and stable life and home environment
seem to shape the bond between the grandparent and child. The grandfathers’ caregiving responsibilities, whatever those may be, are most often considered positive and fulfilling overall; for example:

**Respondent 2**

MT: And then how would you describe your relationship with your grandchildren? The ones you have living here? How would you describe that relationship?

GF: As a father to them.

MT: More like a father? Would you say that you would do anything different with them than you did with your own kids when you were raising them, or is it pretty much the same in terms of both?

GF: Pretty much the same. The only thing now is a little better because of the condition and everything financially.

**Respondent 8**

MT: Right. Would you do it again?

GF: I would do it again, and if they had triplets, I’d do the triplets. I’m enjoying giving it to my grandkids now. I gave it to my kids. So how much more can you give to the grandkids.

MT: Right...another generation.

GF: And you know what...when that Child Protection...I met so many people, grandparents, envy you for this attitude. Some of them went down there...hated their grandkids...

MT: Because you wanted to do it?
GF: I’m going to tell you something, by me having eleven kids, you can see I love kids. And when I don’t have one of them, when I don’t have one, I told you I’ll go get somebody else’s.

**Respondent 9**

GF: Because of my daughter’s situation and because of him and that takes some of the sweetness off our relationship at times. If it hadn’t been for the Lord, I just couldn’t get through.

MT: You might not be able to make it. But, is there too those times when you experience a lot of joy, like for instance, your grandson will be coming home from school soon?

GF: Oh yeah. All that takes away a lot of the sadness and takes away a lot of the minuses. I see him get on the bus. He likes to ride the bus. He likes for me to pick him up lunch at times and I’ll fix his little book bag. It’s just a joy. It’s just a joy and I don’t want anything to disturb that. I don’t want anything to disturb that and I try to make sure that’s not disturbed. The relationship that we have and I try to be there for him. He’ll say that to me too. Matter of fact, he sometimes refers to me as “dad”. I don’t want that to happen. I want you to be with your dad. So, he always says, “You the dad!” So, I try to shut him off up there. Matter of fact, I want him to be with him sometimes because he’s getting older and he may pass on and I want him to enjoy his dad.

The degree of parental involvement also seemed to influence the quality of the grandfather/grandchild relationship. As might be expected, the less involved the parent was in the life of the child, the stronger the bond between the grandparents and their grandchildren. Even in those cases where the grandfather cited that the relationship between the grandchild and the grandmother is strong, the respondents were still very
articulate about how their roles are distinctly different. This was especially true of Respondents 4, 6, 8 and 10.

**Respondent 10**

MT: So, would you say that your relationship with him is kind of one-on-one than more like father-son than grandfather-to-grandson?

GF: Yeah, it's more like a father. Yesterday, he and I we had a conversation probably a couple of hours and he likes to talk and he is very open. He lays everything on the table and if there is something that he don't understand, he wants to understand it so that if something ever arises, he knows how to deal with it, and we have a very good relationship. I am like a second father to him. That's what he told me yesterday. He said, "Hey, Grandpa, you know I really love you", and he said, "I feel so good that you can have all this confidence in me." And, I said, "Yes, I do."

MT: Great! What does he call you?

GF: He calls me "Grandpa".

Even in those few cases where the grandmother was the primary caregiver (Respondents 1 and 7), the grandfathers articulated how they view the relationship and what contributions they believe they are making on behalf of the grandchild's welfare and best interests.

Most of the respondents characterized their relationships with their grandchildren as more like that of a parent to a child. In fact, in at least three of the cases, the grandchildren called the grandfather "daddy." However, this was not always the case, and role conflict emerges when the grandfather wanted to remain more in a grandparent role, despite the grandchild’s desire to treat the grandfather more like his or her father.
Respondent 1

MT: How would you describe your relationship with your granddaughter?

GF: Father-daughter. Treated her like the rest of them.

MT: What would you say was the greatest challenge with raising your granddaughter?

GF: She just fits in, just like the rest, just making sure I did not treat her [any] different than the rest of the crew had treat her. I am just as hard on her and just as easy as I am on the rest of them and, being a girl, her mother (this is the grandmother – we call her Mother) dealt with her a lot and I just did my piece as a father. And, the biggest frustration I had was her parents not doing what they should do.

MT: Right, to support you all in your role of trying to raise her.

GF: Yeah, we never asked for anything but I did not think it was necessary to ask for anything. It would be something a parent would do and they needed to build that relationship for the future relationship and I did not have that...she did not have that support. She just fits right in. She is one of us.

MT: Would you raise another grandchild if given a chance?

GF: Yeah, I guess you asked me would I do it again? At this age, I look back. It would be a hard choice because of the energy that it takes in raising children and my wife and I are older.

I do not know if we would be good parent[s] or not.

MT: Okay, so the idea of having another four or five year old to raise is not appealing?

GF: We probably would not be good parent[s]. We would be good grandparent[s] in the sense of spoiling them and all. We could be good grandparent[s] and send them back home after get through spoiling them but I would not probably have the energy anymore
to bring the structure and the discipline. It would be a disservice. It would be a hard choice because...not that we would not out of love. It is just that I would try to work a situation where we would be part of the child’s life where they would be without having that energy level. It takes a lot of energy to raise children. A five-year (five/six years old) would be awful challenging to do 24-7. It would be challenging for my wife, which would take the bulk of the work. So, I would have to say no. It would be a hard decision because you have a child here. I thought about like my grandson. He is three. If something happened to my daughter, before I would probably take it on but I would have to sit down and talk with all of the other children and say that you all have to be part of this process, and, hopefully, we did not ruin him too much.

Communication challenges and differences in values were the two factors most often expressed as complicating the relationship. Whereas this may not be much different than what was commonly experienced in typical parent/child relationships, the age difference (generation gap) helps to intensify the division according to most of the grandfathers.

**Respondent 3**

MT: Is it more like father-to-child, or is it still more grandparent-to-grandchild?

GF: It’s still like probably grandparent to grandchild because you’ve got the age difference. He’s on one level and I’m on another level and there is a difference between my kids and him because I could communicate more with them because I was more at their age level. But now we’ve got a huge gap here and it makes a difference trying to raise a grandson 17 years old when I’m 60 somethin’. Their lifestyle is completely
different than the way my girls were brought up and from the way I was brought up. We’ve got this “generation” gap. I’m hopin’ that we can get this under control.

The fact that most of the grandfathers indicate that if given the opportunity to assume this role again they would readily do so may be an indication that the benefits far out-weight any of the sacrifices and stresses these relationships may sometimes bring.

A few grandfathers speak of how having this responsibility fills a void in their lives or gives them another opportunity to impact the life of a child, even Respondent 7 who strongly believes that raising the granddaughter should have been some other family member’s obligation besides his and his wife, feels that he could make a positive difference in the young girl’s life over time. In fact, he believes that God had given him this opportunity for a special reason and purpose. Respondent 7 comments:

MT: What kind of hope would you have for this young lady in terms of...you mentioned her being able to go to college, but since you seem removed from what was a fairly negative family situation, and probably poor circumstances to a stable home, what do you think might be on the horizon for her?

GF: Well, I can see that with the proper nurturing and care, she’ll turn out to be a wonderful human being. I know she has some athletic ability. I can see that in her very competitive spirit and she don’t mind competing. As a matter of fact, she was running, she was running with her bare feet. Yeah! I mean, I can see a lot of potential with the proper nurturing, love, and showing that people care about her, and she could be a beautiful young girl.

MT: Do you think that she’ll get over her strong anger?
GF: Oh yeah. I think so. It’s just a matter of trying to be exposed to something different than the environment that she was at. I think that over a period of time, this is going to happen so it will have positives for her.

MT: Are some of the activities, like going shopping with her, or whatever else, school related, more your wife’s responsibilities? Are you now required to read 10-year-old books or look at videos?

GF: My wife does that. We’ll go out to eat sometimes, just the three of us. Or, maybe the two of her cousins or if my wife is going, she’ll say, I want you to go with us, or “Let’s go to Applebee’s” or wherever they want to go, or we’ll go look around. We’ll do that sometimes.

MT: When she gets older, do you think that your relationship will continue to improve or will you become closer?

GF: Oh definitely, it’s going to improve. Right now, I’m more or less, like hands off, like standoffish and watching and seeing how she reacts. I told my wife the other day, I said, “You know. Somebody is going to have to correct her.” She has an attitude problem. She said, “She’s just like her mother and her grandmother with the attitude problem.” Generation to generation passed down. With her being the oldest, and I’m sure that all the rest came after, and the thing about it, they all have different fathers. Ah, what I would offer is that it’s like, to me, it’s helping me grow some in some areas by being exposed to a situation like this and being more tolerant, I would say, and try to remove myself, my own...the things that I want to do, and start thinking about someone else and what I could do to help. Believe me, I’ve prayed about this and asked for guidance and direction. Hey, I just have to deal with it. There’s a reason for everything,
and I certainly believe that there's a reason and a right for everything that happens to us. So, if I can make a difference, and I know it will make a difference in this child's life, I feel like that's what the Lord wants me to do. I've come to grips with that now, whereas before, I wasn't quite sure. But, over a period of time, my wife was adamant about keeping her. I haven't told her that, but I've softened. I've seen that I can do this and it's not taking up much away. There's room in my heart.
B-Formal and Informal Custody

The legally recognized relationships available to grandparents are adoption, guardianship, certification as a foster parent, and powers of attorney. If the grandparent chooses adoption, all rights and obligations of the child's parents are terminated. This can often be a difficult decision, especially when the family is either holding onto hope that a parent still could be responsible for his or her children, or if there is a strong sentiment that taking care of a loved one should not require any judicial action. Furthermore, unless the parent is deceased, it means that the grandparent must admit that their child is an unfit parent. Guardianship may be either permanent or temporary. Certification as a foster parent qualifies the caregiver for financial benefits on a par with other foster parents. This is often referred to as kinship care arrangements. Powers of attorney allow grandparents only to make decisions regarding the grandchildren; they do not transfer legal custody (Kleiner, Hertzog & Targ, 1998).

Many worry about returning their grandchild to an abusive or neglectful environment; their lack of rights may be the impetus to seek legal custody. Seeking custody can be a time consuming, expensive and emotionally draining process. The courts are supposed to base their decision on the “best interests of the child” rather than the interests of the grandparent. However, the rights of the grandparents often come after the rights of the natural parent (Kleiner, Hertzog & Targ, 1998).

Grandparent care arrangements can come about in different ways. National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF) is a nationally representative survey that measures the economic, health, and social characteristics of over 44,000 households. The 1999 NSAF data suggest that for most children (1.1 million in 1999) these arrangements are
made privately, within the family. For other children (200,000 in 1999), child welfare is involved. Child welfare agencies may intervene in families in which abuse or neglect is suspected and either offer services to the families or, if the risk is imminent or ongoing, remove the children from their homes and place them in state-supervised care. The child welfare agency may seek to place the child with a grandparent following an investigation of abuse or neglect, or a grandparent already caring for an abused or neglected child may seek the assistance of the child welfare agency (Scarcella, Macomber & Geen, 2003).

As noted in the scholarly literature on this subject, there are a variety of formal and informal arrangements that grandparents have in carrying out their caregiving roles for their grandchildren. This is also reflected in the various arrangements represented by these ten grandfathers. The range includes guardianship to adoption, depending on the unique circumstances of the family, as well as the length of time that the children have been in their care.

In each case, the grandparents indicated that they plan to keep the grandchildren in their care for the foreseeable future and do whatever was necessary so that the grandchildren are not returned to the child welfare system or to an unfit parent. Some believed that adopting the grandchild is an optimal solution, as it legally precludes the parents from asserting their rights and attempting to take the children back into their care, thus interfering with the grandparent caregiving relationship. Others were working with the courts and county social service agencies to establish a permanent arrangement.

For several of the grandfathers, taking on the role of custodial grandparent was their first time interacting with the child welfare system, as they never encountered the "system" when raising their own children. Their experiences working with the child
welfare system ranged from relatively hassle-free to stressful. In several instances, Child Protective Services was involved and served as a foreign entity to the grandfather.

In the majority of the cases, the grandparents had either rights for their grandchild’s care via adoption or court-appointed guardianship. In every single case, the idea of the grandchild being raised in a foster home by an unrelated adult, or in a group home or some other institutional setting was not an acceptable option to the grandfather. And in a couple of instances, the grandfathers indicated that they also think it was important that the siblings remain together in one home versus living in separate foster care households. And, in some cases, the grandparents already were performing primary care responsibilities anyway, so it made more sense to formalize the arrangement.

Respondent 1

MT: What was the primary reason that led you to raise your grandchild?

GF: Her mother had a series of...after she left our house, had a series of bad relationships and the child was taken away from her by CPS [Child Protective Services], put into the foster care system, and then we received her for six months; and, then, gave her back to the mother and then again and again. She had gotten married, because of a bad relationship with her husband; the child was going through some psychological and physical abuse. She was put into the foster care system again and then, after I guess X number of years or months, they said that they were going to take her out of the foster care system and put her up for adoption and we said...She had all of her children taken away from her and then the last child was never given back to her. The judge or the caseworker said you have the option of taking two children back (no more than two). We are going to give you the other one back and XXXX will be put up for adoption and we
said we did not want that to happen. So, we stepped up and said that we would adopt her and the other child I had never seen. They just totally took the child away from the mother and that is how we got involved.

MT: Great, so, then you went through the adoption process or you adopted her out of the foster care system?

GF: Yeah, we went through the whole adoption process, court, and all of that (whatever that process was) and adopted. They gave us approval. She had come to live with us and they gave approval to go ahead. We had a choice either this or they were not going to let us keep her as the foster parents. So, we thought they should let us keep her as foster parents but they do not do that but, at any time they want to, they can come and take her away from us.

MT: So, the adoption route was, of course, a better option or became the option versus keeping her in foster care?

GF: Yeah, keeping her in foster care and not knowing if we could keep her permanently or they come any time at a whim. They would come into your home anytime they wanted to and inspect and we had no problem adopting her. We thought it would be a better option for us. It would give us more privacy and less stress and having to deal with that system which we had felt like was an unfair and unjust system at times dealing with the mother (how they treated her as if she had no rights). The case manager treated her as if she had no rights. It just really was bad so I did not have a good feeling for the foster care system (how they juggle kids around like pawns on a board and do not really at times get what is best for them). I would think that relationship than foster care would be

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better (especially grandparents would be better) than strangers and that could be something that would be secure for the child because the system...

Respondent 2

MT: You had mentioned that you had adopted the kids five or so years ago. What was the primary reason?

GF: Daughter was not doing good. She was off and on leaving and neglected them and once they come to took them away from her a couple of times and she would straighten up and then afterward when she was pregnant with that last one and I knew that she told that Judge that she wasn't going to stay with us. I did one thing. I asked my wife to ask her if I could adopt her children.

MT: She was willing to do that?

GF: I already had them at this point.

MT: Right, but they were still in your care?

GF: So I asked permission to adopt all of them. That way I don't feel like I took them from her and then if she still, I am a parent and if she comes to help me and then the children do know their parent. Even the baby knows. I want that to be known. So they won't get into later years and wind up confused and this one married and that one to the other, and I always relate this story to a lot of them so they don't do that.

Respondent 6

GF: These are my daughter’s kids we adopted. The two of them didn’t have no where to go. We went and got ‘em and have had them ever since. The mother was staying here, but she got a little too rowdy.

MT: What was the original reason that they came to live with you guys?
GF: Well...uh...my objection...I see what was going on. They didn’t have no where to stay.

MT: So, their mom wasn’t providing a home for them?

GF: She stayed here for a little bit. Things didn’t work out too good....she....I don’t know where she is now.

MT: You haven’t been in contact with her lately?

GF: Not lately.

GM: Not in about two months.

MT: When did you formally adopt the grandchildren?

GM: Okay. The adoption for the 19 and the 17 year-old boys was February 28 of ’02. And we adopted the girl in ’03.

MT: ’03. But, essentially they’ve been around...so they’ve been in your home most of all their lives, right?

GF: Yes.

Several of the grandfathers seemed a little embarrassed by the specific circumstances surrounding the decision to care for their grandchildren, perhaps because it may have cast a negative view on their parenting skills or revealed family secrets too painful to share. However, Respondent 9’s account of the events that led up to his particular situation with his daughter was probably the most illustrative and detailed. A digest is provided here:

MT: What were the reasons that led to your providing care for them?

GF: Well, it’s a long story. My daughter, she was here until she was like 28 years old and she wanted to move and get an apartment. So we said that would be fine. She’s the
oldest daughter. Of course my other two sons had always been in the service. They always moved. She was still home. So she wanted to move and that’s fine and we got her an apartment and the whole nine yards. And she ran into a young man that was pretty bad. I think he was on dope, but anyway, she didn’t stay with him for very long. Then, XXXX’s father….she ran into him and became pregnant with him. He died of an overdose, cocaine overdose. So then that left her with XXXX. So she struggled with her by herself until she ran on to XXXX’s dad, who is a “crack head”. So, she got pregnant with him, by him, and this went on. She was now strung out really bad. She worked at XXXX School and she was on to this other boy. She was pretty high and she was driving the kids. Her job was to take care of the kids and take them different places. I really got upset with her because there she was leaving XXXX in Pampers. You can just draw the picture out…mother on “coke” or crack or whatever. So, I went by myself and I just got completely upset and I told her, “If you don’t straighten yourself up, I’m going to get something done. I’m going to have to go somewhere because I can’t stand seeing the kids neglected”. So, that was like on a Sunday. So, Monday then I go to her job and I talk to the supervisor. They couldn’t help her until they tested her. Matter of fact, I was trying not to disclose her name or whatever, but they said, “Oh we can help her, but we need to test her.” Well, they tested her, and the needle just went off the chart. So, they discharged her. Now she’s upset with me. She got fired! “You made me leave my job! Dad, you should have never!” So, we just completely fell out, and then she was all strung out and otherwise it was pretty horrible. She’s living in a subsidized apartment with XXXX’s dad. He wasn’t on the lease. They got in a big argument up there. They threw
her out and he hadn’t paid the rent. Anyway, they got her for probation, criminal trespassing. So they arrested her and put her in jail. So, now the kids are just out there.

MT: Did the kids go to the guardian’s home or something?

GF: No, I just took them. I just simply took the kids and we went from there. They were receiving his Social Security, XXXX was. XXXX was receiving her dad’s Social Security. It was all going to the mother and we were then taking care of the kids. We couldn’t put them in school. We couldn’t buy them clothes because of our situation, our financial situation. We would go by from time to time and ask her to give us some money for the children, you know, and she just went off and off. So, then we just went to the lawyer and said we’ll just take complete custody. It’s simple. They’re here. She’s not even capable...in the situation that she’s in. So, that’s how we got to where we are now.

MT: Did she put up any fight when you tried to get custody?

GF: Oh, yes. She didn’t want that. She thought she was the mother. But, we talked to her and she finally agreed. She appeared in court with us.

Two of the grandfathers (Respondents 2 and 5) spoke of how time consuming and demanding the adoption process was, which included extensive home visits, numerous interviews and training classes in order to get and keep their grandchildren in their care.

**Respondent 2**

MT: What adjustments did you have to make to be back in the mode of having kids in the house?

GF: Oh, Lord. Which one thing? My wife, we went to see a friend who was sick and my wife said, “Well, I just taken in my grandchildren and adopted them.” He was sick and
she said to him, "What do you think about me? You think I need my head examined?"

He said, Uh huh! To tell you the truth, things mainly are a whole lot different than raising my own, because with the adoption there is a lot you can do and there is a lot you can't do. That's what upset the whole thing.

MT: So, it's a whole new learning?

GF: Someone gonna come in and tell you something by a book they never even raised by experience. I raised my own then had to raise two of my nieces for a while so their mother could get back in because she lost her husband in Texas. And we took all of the children from her because she was pressing on her too much and there were five and we gave them back to her later.

MT: The whole idea of going through the adoption process. How did you navigate your way through that? I mean, you've not had any experience before …

GF: Going through this, we didn't know what it was, kind of complicated and perplexing. Having someone tell me what you have to do to when you have raised your brothers and sisters. I was given authority over them and I raised my brothers and sisters here, and I raised my children and I raised someone else's two and then filling out the paperwork and I said they don't even have a baby, what are you talking about? I had to go and keep my mouth shut. I went through it. I went one place, it was foster kind and then foster care and then before we get to the main one was adopting. It was what they said the problem we would have adopting because you're kinfolk, a kinship relationship. It's much harder than…they made it harder. In the meantime I'm doin' this and I had a problem. My momma in West Virginia in and out of the hospital and I had to run from out of the class and go there and see my mamma and my wife called me and she said, "Honey, I think
you better come back home.” Certain things will happen and you have to have this last piece. And that was called the Court.

MT: Tell me more about it.

GF: They lie and a lot of them were lost and foster children trying to...I had to come back...that was the day we had the half day, but the teacher wanted to stay over and wanted to know if I would stay over and take that on. I said, “Yes, ma'am.” I am glad I did. We went to school, went to CPR classes, and take first aid...I had to go and...I started out one place and didn't get in that place so I had to go to Wishard Hospital to do CPR classes. My wife already had hers from when she was doing childcare work at the church. That made it sure that everything was done and the paperwork. On top of that, there were some things I didn't take at the beginning when we started this and one of my daughters had to go in for the same thing. I was in class with her. I said, “What're you doing here?” I got this piece of paper proving I have all of it. It was something we had to do, had to do. Answer the questions right, and they come out and check the house and how things are provided for and bed and who is sleeping in this bed and how much room you got, how big is the room, what about food? They come into the cabinets and check what kind of food you got in the freezer and frig!

MT: Are you getting any subsidy or reimbursement?

GF: We got something for when we went to Court with the kids; something for each one. We went to Court to file adoption and my wife had already been questioned and then the Judge talked about him going to church and so when the Judge come up in here and say, “Do you agree what your wife said?” I said, "Yes, ma'am!" BAM adoption approved!
Smiled! Lots of people looking up like what happened. We got it. We got the paper. Legally.

**Respondent 5**

MT: Tell me a little bit more...you had gone through the court system to get your grandson. Do you now have custody of him?

GF: Yeah. I have custody of him. We had to go through...well, actually they call it "foster care", but it’s the same program for kinship. I wasn’t interested in trying to keep kids. We took a 20-hour class. We took CPR, First Aid, you know.

MT: You took CPR. You took First Aid. And, they came out and did a home study?

GF: Several home studies. Then we went back to court. Each time my daughter and son would go to court, I still don’t understand today why he is going to court because she is the one that got the child taken from her. She would leave him with open wounds and she had possession of a gun. School would call several times. Now, he’s on the street.

In the case of Respondent 4, he shares that he would rather not adopt his two granddaughters, as he is still holding out hope that their mother might one day be able to provide and care for them. Unfortunately, at the time of interview, the grandfather had not seen his daughter in several months, and he suspects that she is doing drugs and hanging out on the streets. However, he talks about how having his grandchildren under his care has helped him to deal with his loneliness and grief as a result of his wife’s recent death.
Respondent 4

MT: Tell me a little bit again about your daughter in terms of what relationship she has with her kids and the numbers of times or the frequency of your being able to talk to her or see her.

GF: Well, since she left, I haven’t talked to her probably in about three, almost four months. Now my youngest granddaughter has a telephone number and she calls her and she’s talked to her several times and she’s made promises that she is going to take them to a movie and that she is going to come and give them some money and do this and do that, but it’s never materialized. She has promised them for Christmas that she is going to come and give them both five dollars a piece. Yes, five dollars! That’s the kind of young lady that she is. She takes more of herself and her boyfriend than she do of her children. Not very much at all.

MT: But in terms of the relationship that your grandkids have with her; they probably are still attached to her?

GF: Oh, they love her to death, and I try to instill in them...we were just talking about it last night and praying for her, and I want them to continue to love her because some day, I was telling them, I won’t be here always and they might have to fall back in her hands and if they do, I want them to have a good relationship with her.

MT: And they understood that?

GF: Yeah.

There is but one grandfather (Respondent 7) who was caring for a grandchild through an informal arrangement. And, of the ten grandfathers interviewed, this particular case also represented the shortest length of time (6 months) caring for a
grandchild. It was clear that the grandmother was most interested in stabilizing the granddaughter’s life situation, and seeking legal custody was not a priority at this time, especially given the ambivalence of the grandfather.

MT: Do you think you and your wife will seek to have your granddaughter either in foster care or even think about adopting her at some point?

GF: No, at this point we haven’t discussed that. Right now, she is trying to make a difference. This is my wife. She’s trying to make a difference in her life because this child has an attitude problem and really she needs some mentoring. She needs some…because she cries very easily and she’s been, I don’t know, afraid. She’s not use to authority, and the same thing when she goes to school, even though it has improved from the first semester until now. When she got the last report card, the teacher said she has improved as far as her attitude, but she still has a ways to go.
C-Spousal Relationships

The professional literature on this particular subject was virtually silent, as most accounts of grandparent caregivers is focused on single grandmothers. There is little to no attention given to how this role might affect grandparents’ marital and romantic relationships, other than to acknowledge that caregiving of this type is potentially stressful and demanding, which might suggest that one’s relationships with a spouse, other family members, friends and acquaintances might be compromised as a result of how much time it requires to rear your grandchildren.

All of the grandfathers interviewed spoke about the ultimate decision to accept primary responsibility for the care of their grandchildren as being a joint one between them and their wives; this was even the case with the widowed grandfather who is currently raising his grandchildren alone. And, even more revealing, each grandfather spoke very fondly of their wives, especially in the context of what contributions these grandmothers were making to the grandchildren and family. It was evident that roles for caregiving were largely shared and relatively interchangeable.

A couple of grandfathers acknowledged that most of their collective attention was given to the care of the grandchildren, and to a lesser extent to one another. One grandfather mentions that his desires for physical intimacy were still strong, but his wife was not willing to engage in any sexual activity because of the grandchild’s presence in the home. Since most of the grandparents were not expecting to fulfill the caregiver role, they did not have much time to consider what impact it will have on their marital/romantic relationships, as the opportunity to take on this role often presents itself without much notice. It was more difficult to determine what these marital relationships
were pre- and post- becoming grandparent caregivers. Most of the couples were heavily involved in their grandchildren’s lives prior to being primary caretakers or they have had their own children living in the home and have had little to no time for just themselves.

The majority of the grandfathers (8 out of 10) were currently married—a few as long as nearly 45 years. And of the two that are no longer married, one was recently widowed following a marriage of 42 years, and the other is divorced from his wife for six years. However, in the latter case, the grandchildren in his care were descendants of him and his second wife.

Respondent 1 gave most of the credit to his wife as the one being mainly responsible for his providing day-to-day care to their granddaughter, along with being a stay-at-home mother to their other eight children. Respondents 1 and 7 were the only two grandfathers that described themselves as being less hands-on or directly involved in the caregiving responsibilities of their grandchildren, but for distinctly different reasons. Respondent 1 inferred that working full-time in the past and presently in order to provide financially for his large family precludes him from being as involved with the children and granddaughter as his wife, though he still maintained that the overall responsibility are very much shared by both he and his wife, and that they were a team.

On the other hand, Respondent 7 believed that his wife’s decision to move the child into their home without his knowledge or consent was a major threat to their marriage (of ten years). He further expressed that he believed that the wife’s granddaughter was coming between the two of them and that the girl would be better off living with some other relative.
Respondent 7

MT: How has having her here affected your relationship with your wife?

GF: It’s been trying! I’ve been trying to understand. I’ve been praying about it. At first, I totally rejected it, to be honest with you. I thought I was too old and that this time has passed me by. “I’m really not trying to raise no child, and I just can’t understand why you are doing this.” I told her that. And she said, “Well, I feel like I have to do this.” I said, “Well, look, she’s got a living mother, a living grandmother that’s about your age, and she has two great-grandparents younger than me and I said, “Why do you want to put this on me!” I’ve been praying about it. I’m in excellent health. It’s not about a health issue. I’m in excellent health and the Lord has blessed me with that, and I’m thinking that maybe this is something I should do.

MT: Perhaps it’s your infringement of time...

GF: Yeah! If we want to go somewhere. Yeah, the infringement of time. Like I want to do some things with my wife and we can’t do that because she feels she is responsible. And, she has to be here for her instead of being with me. So now I sort of know now because at first, I was really....

MT: You weren’t having it were you?

GF: To be honest with you, no. I said, “This child is coming between us.” I felt that way, really to be honest with you. And I said, “It would be somethin’ else if it were our grandchild. It’s not our grandchild!” She has another living grandmother. You know, the mother don’t want her, but she has a living grandmother who don’t have any children at home. I said, “Why?” She said, “Well, they don’t want her.” I said, “The thing that
really bothers me is that you didn’t discuss this with me. The next thing I knew, the child was at our house.”

MT: In the beginning, did she make it seem like maybe this was kind of temporary like she was just kind of coming over for a little while?

GF: Yeah, just staying over night?

MT: Did it ever get to the point where you said, “Hey, either her or me?”

GF: Yeah! It got to that and I said, “You know what, you can leave anytime you want. I’ll always be here.” I was really belligerent about it. I said, “I’m not taking care and changing my lifestyle for no child at this point in time at my age.” I said, “I’m 70 years old. I said, “You’re only 44, 45 years old. It’s different for you!” I said, “That time has passed me by.” I want to do things! I want to go places! I still do!

MT: Well, do you think that she did not ask you or didn’t present it to you because she thought that you would say no?

GF: I’m sure that was the case!

MT: She was fearful of you saying, “No, that can’t happen” so she thought perhaps that if it was just done, you would be more inclined.

GF: It’s more or less like you said, man, over a period of time, I started, you know, “is this a permanent thing?” At some point in time, I asked her, “What’s going on here?” “Well, I might keep her.” I said, “Don’t expect no help from me!” That’s what I said!

Respondent 8 asserted that his break-up with his last wife was partly due to him choosing to keep his two grandsons in his care. He shared that his former mother-in-law encouraged his wife to leave him since the grandchildren were not hers biologically and therefore should not be her responsibility. He and his second wife (the grandchildren’s
biological grandmother) have kept an amicable relationship with open communication in order to best provide and care for their grandchildren. Incidentally, the grandmother was raising the granddaughter who is the sister to the boys. The grandmother shared adoption rights of the girl with this grandfather.

**Respondent 8**

GF: And, but like I said, we took the boys at that time, my wife and I took them to our care, and we had them for two weeks, and I thought the way it was, I thought it was beautiful. I thought everything was well. And what happened...uh...my wife is from Georgia. And I just found out during that time that I really didn’t truly have my wife as I should have because she was still hooked to mama, and I didn’t know...and I didn’t know a lot of time...these are personal things that I’m telling you...when she explained to her mother...she thought her mother would be real happy for her that, you know, she said, mom, guess what, XXXX and I went downtown and we’ve got his grandkids, and she was bubbling with joy. And when I came in from work that particular day, I remember just as plain, her mother had talked to her and said, “Girl, you better know what you’re getting yourself into”. And my ex-mother-in-law put some evil in my wife head-wise and they are more or less people/women of God. And she told her that, uh, “those are not your grandkids, those are XXXX’s ex-wife’s grandkids” so she was more or less planting a bad seed to say “you better know what you’re getting into”. What could you get into? But that was the mentality that she had. But they see what a mistake has been made now because out of that I still kept the boys. She took my four kids and left me and she’s been gone those same years that we grabbed them from the system. We only had them for two weeks. And she was with me for those two weeks.
And she's been gone ever since within those six years so...

In Respondent 6’s case, I had both the grandfather and grandmother present during the interview, which was probably a good idea, as the grandfather was older (77) and had some cognitive challenges. Her perspective and input were tempered in both the transcript as well as in the analysis since she was not the primary respondent. Just the same, her presence helped to affirm and strengthen what the grandfather seems to know but was not always able to communicate to me clearly. This couple had been raising their grandchildren for most of the children’s lives (they are now young adults at 17 and 19 years-old), and the role appeared to be the cornerstone of their marriage, at least it seemed to occupy most of the grandparent’s time and attention.

Several of the grandfathers, particularly Respondents 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10 spoke of how raising their grandchildren had really brought meaning and joy to their marital relationship by requiring them to work cooperatively with one another to successfully fulfill their caregiving roles. These were also grandfathers in fairly good health, financially stable and who have a deep love for children in general.

Respondent 2

MT: How in any way would you say that your relationship with your wife--and you guys have been married over 40 years--you know, you have raised your kids and then now with the grandkids. How would you say that having the kids come live here has affected your relationship at all?

GF: It hasn't affected it at all. It's perfect because she was more concerned about her children and I was busy working and they were always calling her mamma, and see by this happening and I think in mind that she was waiting to see whether I would be able to
accept the children like this because the time that they called from the home and said they were ready to take them out we were there and got them and we was living in an apartment and we weren't supposed to have no children. So, I told all of them to stay in one room, two boys and two girls in one room. They was babies. Make no noise. You're not supposed to be here. The whole school sees them. I run them from here all the way from Mississippi to the township to XXXXth Street and another township to get them in the educational system. Keep the grades.

Respondent 3

MT: How, if any, has the last few months changed, or affected your relationship with your wife?

GF: Well, it really hasn't. It's probably brought us a little closer again because we have to work in their behalf so it really hasn't made a change in our lives, other than now we have to get our heads together and stuff like that for them. She's going to retire here pretty soon. She may come out this year at XXXX so that will probably make things a little better because right now, she's still trying to work and take care of the youngest girl, and you know, my grandson is no problem. He's more my responsibility at this age and stuff so you don't worry to much about him, but the little girl, taking her places, and we are back to that go, go, go, go!

Respondent 4

GF: I guess you can tell that my wife was my life, you know. I loved her very much. She loved me a lot and so we just had a beautiful relationship. Around this time of year.... I was just telling my mother. My mother came and spent Thanksgiving with us, and I told her, you don't know how you made me feel because we went to the store
together at the same time my wife and I did. I’ve always been a person who has helped clean and cook. As a matter of fact, my sister-in-law just called me just before Thanksgiving and was telling me how spoiled I had my wife and I was telling her that it wasn’t spoiling to me. Those were things that were the reward, you know. I’d help her cook and get cleaned up and everything and it gave me more time to play with her and that’s what I tell young people now that I’ll be talking to that are married. As a matter of fact, we were talking about that at our church and we were talking about marriage. It’s a beautiful relationship. Are you married?

MT: Yes, I am.

GF: It’s a beautiful relationship and we had that kind of relationship. It was fun. We had our disagreements sometime, but it never went on overnight and it never went on over a week and nobody came in the house not speaking or whatever because of some difficulty. It was like that. You know, by being in the military, my time was short. I’m here today and I’m gone tomorrow. For instance, one time when President Kennedy… I had been to Cuba doing some training. I stepped in my house, put my arms around my wife, and there was a driver there to kick me out because I had to load the ship up and get ready to leave and I didn’t get to see her again for about three months.

MT: What is something that you would say to other grandparents, particularly ones who are in your same situation where their wife has passed and they are raising their grandkids? What would you tell them that they should or shouldn’t do?

GF: It was easy for me because I have been doing this all along in their lives, and so it was just that I had a female partner to help me, and so, after my wife passed, it just became all me, but all the time, it was her. She would tell me that she wanted to do this
and she wanted to do that. It was a partnership. It wasn’t all on me and it wasn’t all about her. We both did this together. We wanted to raise these children together and we wanted to take care of them just like our son. I expect my oldest grandson spends more time alone than my son did because when he was here this summer, he came and spent the summer with me and there was no problem. Now, my youngest granddaughter, I could send her there and it wouldn’t be no problem. My oldest granddaughter, I couldn’t send her. I’d have to have her accompanied by somebody to send her. My grandson, he was a blessing. I would check his schoolwork and absolutely had no problem at all.

MT: Did people say to you after your wife passed, “Now what are you going to do about those granddaughters of yours”, or “What’s going to happen now?” Or, did people automatically assume that life would just go on as it was or did people try to approach you, or….

GF: No, not one time. I think they just saw how we had been spending our lives and I think they just expected it to continue on and we were here all the time. Like I said, I believe that one of the biggest reasons for me is that it just made things easier by having them than by being alone. It would have been very, very difficult.

**Respondent 9**

GF: Well, my friends, people at church know the situation I’m in and they encourage me. My wife knows the situation we are in, and we encourage each other. It’s almost like a universal problem so everybody knows other people, of course, and everybody kind of gets together and talks about our problems with the grandkids. I’ve even been in the grocery store and somebody will walk up to me and we will get started about grandkids, and it’s always been the same thing when my daughter was in jail. So it seems like all
around we go. We go to the grocery store, drugstore, church, so it's just an encouraging thing since everything is like that. With the Lord in my life too, I'm really sustained all around really. It seems like it's just the kind of life I need, but about the kids, and that's another opportunity and you can't go off and get mad. None of that. It's about the kids. It's because they are here. So, you know that has been a problem, but we get together and we encourage each other.

MT: In some ways, do you think it has brought you even closer together?

GF: Yes, I think so. I think we are closer, and when the kids weren't here, we were really tight. We love each other and we get along together. So, I don't know. There are other times that maybe could have been tighter, but we've just been together and I think by us being each other before the kids came, that's keeping us together. I think we need one another. We just decided that this is what we're going to have to do. It's nobody's fault, you know, so we don't point fingers at each other. Maybe like I said before, I'll say something that she doesn't agree with about the kids, and we'll debate about that because like I said before, I'm a little more passive than she thinks I ought to be, and I think the two opposites just attract.

MT: They also balance too.

GF: Right! That keeps us together. Like I said, she likes to decorate and I like to work at different things so we get together and do that.

**Respondent 10**

MT: In some ways, do you think raising your grandson has strengthened and enriched your marriage?
GF: Yes, it has because by hoping that we set the example for him and we try to show him that marriage isn’t real good and pie and ice cream all the time, but it takes work. Everything is work and in order to get something, you have to give something and you get what you put into it. For him to see it, he sees the good and the bad, you know. He said, “Grandpa, she gets rude with you sometimes.” I said, “No, she likes to express herself.” She likes to make sure that there’s no question. I don’t ask a lot and I just deal with it. He says, “Oh, okay!”

Respondent 5 voluntarily shared that his sex life with his wife has declined since they began caring for their grandson. He said that his wife made excuses for not being physically intimate with him mainly because the child is in the home and serves as an impediment. His wife did not seem to be particularly concerned about the couple’s sexual abstinence, and he too made light of the situation, suggesting that this was a relatively small sacrifice to make.

MT: Tell me about how has it changed your relationship or affected your relationship with your wife now that you’ve got a kid back in the house….has that made things different between the two of you in any way? Are you guys closer?

Respondent 5

GF: I feel…I understand now this here…I don’t feel that sometimes I get my attention that I need because…I mean, I’m not a dead soldier…”Hey baby!” “I’m tired!” “Well, yeah…goodnight!” It’s got to be the right moment, and it don’t look like it’s too many of them because when I get in, she’s tired. I get in; I might want to be lively… It’s not happenin’! Because we got to sacrifice. So I’ve got to let that go. Gotta let that go. Sometimes, both one will be gone or asleep….Oh man!
MT: So the intimacy is a little....

GF: Dead!

GF: Because the first month or two, he couldn’t sleep in his bed cuz’ he.... “I can’t sleep by myself. I need the light on.” So, we started leaving the light on and the television. We got a television. And, he finally got adjusted and started staying in his room, and then, it’s too late...I’m tired. I done wear out. I done did all this! That didn’t work either! You know what I mean?
Most grandparents caring for a grandchild are eligible for financial assistance, yet few receive it. Regardless of their incomes, grandparents can receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) child-only payments to help pay for their grandchild’s care in most states. Payment amounts differ from state to state; in 2000 they ranged from $68 to $514 per month for one child, with an average of $238 per month. These amounts decline for each additional child and do not vary depending on the age of the child. Grandparents caring for a child involved with the child welfare system can receive foster care payments if the child is taken into state custody and the grandparent meets foster care licensing requirements. In 1999 basic foster care payments differed from state to state and ranged on average from $250 to $657 per month depending on the age of the child, with an overall national average of $403 per month. Additional foster payments are made at the same rate for additional children.

Moreover, foster parents typically receive supplemental payments for clothing, school expenses, or for the care of special needs children. Yet despite their eligibility for assistance, only 29 percent of children in grandparent care live in families receiving foster care or child-only payments. This percentage does not differ significantly from the 24 percent of children living with other relatives who receive this assistance (Scarcella, Macomber & Geen, 2003). According to researchers, many grandparents, like other relative caregivers, also do not receive help for food insecurity or housing problems. Of those children in low-income grandparent families, 16 percent live in families receiving housing assistance. For families with food insecurity, income-eligible grandparent households can receive food stamps to supplement their food supply, and can include
their grandchild in their food stamps allocation. Of children in low-income grandparent care families, 43 percent live in families receiving food stamps. Levels of food and housing assistance are similarly low for children living with other relative caregivers (Scarcella, Macomber & Geen, 2003).

Few grandparent caregivers, or other relative caregivers, receive needed mental health services. For about one in five (19 percent) children with a grandparent caregiver in poor mental health, the grandparent is receiving the appropriate services needed. This percentage is similarly low for those children living with other types of relative caregivers in poor mental health (21 percent). However, for many children in either grandparent care or relative care, the relative appears connected to social supports in the community. For 82 percent of children living with a grandparent and 83 percent living with another relative, their caregiver knows of at least one source of help in the community, such as a place to turn for help with housing or food problems, drug or alcohol problems, or to get away from a violent family member. Additionally, for 84 percent of children in grandparent care and 90 percent of children living with another relative, their caregiver attends a religious service at least a few times during the survey year (Scarcella, Macomber & Geen, 2003). These findings are based on data from the 1999 National Survey of American Families (NSAF), a nationally representative survey that measures the economic, health, and social characteristics of over 44,000 households.

Again, most of the scholarly literature on this subject of support systems for custodial grandparent caregivers cites the use of support groups, respite care, case management services and other assistance from human service professionals and direct
financial assistance (Burton, 1992; Casper & Bryson, 1998; Chaflie, 1994; Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 1997; Jendrek, 1994; Minkler & Roe, 1996; Poe, 1992).

Most of the literature detailing resources for grandparent caregivers tends to emphasize support groups. Such groups are on the increase in the United States and in the local community, often being administered by a community center, church or area council on aging. However, none of the men I interviewed were involved with a formal group, though in the case of Respondent 6, the wife was participating occasionally in one by herself.

Conversely, the majority of the grandfathers expressed a deep sense of spirituality and consistently cited their personal faith as the primary source of support and strength. There were no specific questions asked about religion per the interview guide, but it often surfaced when many of the grandfathers speak about their experiences as caregivers to their grandchildren. Again, this was an area that has not been explored and developed in the scholarly literature for this specific population, despite it being an issue that is frequently surveyed with adults in need of intervention with a particular problem. One’s spirituality in many ways serves as an asset when dealing with stressful situations or as a means for demonstrating resilience. This was very much the case with almost all of the grandfathers interviewed.

Thus, the two categories or themes were combined because none of the grandfathers used the term “support system” nor are they very specific in listing supports, other than their personal faith and spirituality as the most frequent and important source for their day-to-day persistence and survival.
When the grandfathers did touch on other sources of support, these were most often inferred and included things such as involvement from a parent or other family member, or minimal assistance from social service agencies, as well as help from the grandchildren’s teachers, which was mostly focused on addressing academic remediation. The latter is discussed in more detail in the theme dealing with the grandfathers’ role in their grandchildren’s education and extra-curricular activities.

As previously stated, informal support for grandfathers was more evident versus external assistance. This was even true in cases when the family had been involved with Child Protective Services and had been in contact with a designated caseworker. It appeared that the families were not relying on additional support from agencies, nor were they continuing a relationship with personnel that represent them. Perhaps spirituality played a more significant role in the lives of the grandfathers interviewed because by and large they have spouses to share in the caregiving responsibilities as well as more financial resources available to them compared, on the average, to single grandmothers raising their grandchildren alone.

Here are some of the more poignant remarks on both the issue support systems and spirituality and the roles they played in grandfathers’ abilities to care for their grandchildren; these are representative of similar comments made by Respondents 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10:

**Respondent 1**

GF: We have never taken advantage of any grandparent programs primarily because we did not know of any until recently when we started getting involved at... there was even such a thing as grandparent support for that particular stuff and we probably would have
taken advantage of it but we did not know it. We were totally unaware that there was any...were not aware of this growing number of grandparents until recently our agency got involved. So, we did not take advantage around grandparent support system. We just fit it in just like a normal child...

Respondent 2

MT: Do you think about if you were to become ill or in a position where you couldn't provide care, how would you handle that with the kids? What would then happen?

GF: Right now, my wife is in a situation where she can't do anything and I am the one doing it. I have the two children. She takes care of them, and if anything happens then I turn around and look and I can only go so far. The pastor comes and checks up and prays on me and gives me moral support. That helps a lot. The children won't let anything happen. They were always there.

Below are specific comments on the subject of faith and spirituality in particular:

Respondent 1

MT: What role have you played in her spiritual and religious formation and what role has that area of your life played in you being able to raise your kids?

GF: That is our foundation for all of the household (our spiritual life), so XXXX has been raised up in part of that whole system. Therefore, she has been part of that worship experience. That is what she has received and she is part of that now at her own choice. She is involved in church choir and stuff, made a profession for Christ as a young person, and very (not very) but she is committed with the other young people to doing what she is doing. That is the key to us for our children.

Respondent 2
MT: You mentioned the Bible and your work in the church. How much would you say your personal faith and your spirituality have played into your being a grandparent and taking on this responsibility?

GF: One hundred percent. Because I was born to religious parents and both were Christians. Daddy was a minister and then I am the oldest and there was 11 of us. Seven boys and four girls. And I am the oldest one. I was the sacrificial one. I had to give to them. I quit school to go in the coal mines and work and going back to make sure they had money. The Depression.

**Respondent 4**

MT: What difference do you think you are making by having them with you?

GF: I believe it’s religion and Jesus in my life. I’ve always had God in my life for a long time. He brought me through a whole lot of things. As a matter of fact, I was just reading a scripture at church and I asked them the question. I asked him if they had ever been alone with God with no other American citizen around and in a foreign country and wounded and you need some help, but there was nobody to call, and you call and there was nobody to answer you. You know. But, God heard our prayer and he saved me and I guess it was so I could come back and be with these kids and that was the answer to that, and he feels that I am no different than anybody’s else’s children. We are happy here together and I try to instill religion to them so they can have that kind of relationship and that is going really, really well.

**Respondent 5**

MT: How important is your faith to you in terms of being a source of strength and your spiritual foundation?
GF: Very much so. But, you either believe it or not. Without Him, nothing is possible. I don’t care...my whole life is based on Jesus. At one time, I’ll tell you no lie, I was a hell raiser back in my days. You know, I did my thang, but as I grew, man, I realized the value of life and where all source come from. Not your luck...where it come from, but your blessings come from, you know. He is the source. He makes everything possible. That’s what I want to instill upon anybody as it relates to me. Man, I was dyin’ at one time. I was real sick. I was down to 125 pounds.

When I asked Respondent 8 about how he dealt with his terrible accident but still remained so upbeat and positive about his life and grandchildren, despite his physical challenges, he cited his deep spirituality as the source of his strength.

MT: Right. How did you keep your, what it seems to be, positive attitude even through your accident?

GF: My relation to my daddy and I mean I was taught to, uh, that God is everything, you know, he will be your mama, your daddy, sister, everything, and that’s what happened. When I went in my coma, that’s where I was telling you the Lord told me what had happened in my coma, and it happened exactly that way, but it is my faith in God because you know when I, it’s really good sometimes. Sometimes bad turns into good in which this case it did.

MT: What has helped to sustain you all this time?

Respondent 9

GF: Oh my, I’ve gotten to know the Lord a lot better. I’ve grown closer to Him because I’ve needed him to do things for me that just can’t be done physically. Such as finally changing her mind around and pulling her out of situations that I knew she shouldn’t go
into. I have just become a stronger Christian because of the fact that I’ve had to pray. You know, before the children...every day I would see them without a home with their mother and that would make me call on the Lord or read my Bible more. I’ve done that before. I’ve been that way with faith since I was 18 years old. This is really tight. I truly, truly buckle down because of the fact that it has to be God who does the things that have to be done.
E-Parental Involvement

According to Dr. Arthur Kornhaber (1996), an expert in the study of grandparenting, he reminds grandparent caregivers of the importance of recognizing that they are still the parent of the grandchild’s parent. Even though the grandparent may be very angry and have lost respect for the child, it is the responsibility of the grandparent to help their son or daughter as much as possible. Perhaps the grandparent’s ability to be polite and forgiving will be tried, but he says to always remember that people do grow and change. So grandparents should maintain a hopeful attitude, yet at the same time, always be realistic about the challenges they face.

Dr. Kornhaber suggests that the grandparent assures the grandchild that there will always be a place for the child’s father and/or mother in the family. This behavior on the grandparent’s part sends a wonderful message to the grandchild, for he will be observing how the grandparents relate to his parents. For the sake of the grandchild, the grandparent should always keep the lines of communication open to the parents. Needless to say, this last recommendation presents some special challenges, especially when the contact can be potentially emotionally or physically detrimental to the child. Moreover, many have to deal with their resentment toward the grandchild’s parents for thrusting the responsibility upon them. Others view the failure of the parent as their own failure and feel responsible and overwhelmed with guilt (Kornhaber, 1996).

Additionally, these grandparents must deal with the trauma that precipitated their role as caregiver. For instance, if the child’s parent has died, the grandparent must cope not only with his own grief, but also with the grief of his grandchild. An adult child's problems with drugs or alcohol, abuse or neglect, or teenage pregnancy, require
grandparents to cope with the loss of their own hopes and expectations for their son or daughter. This may best describe what was going on in Respondent 3’s family, as his grandchildren’s mother (his biological daughter) had been murdered by the youngest grandchild’s father.

**Respondent 3**

MT: At some point, you would like for your granddaughter to have some contact with her other grandmother, but you were waiting until the trial; how will you try to facilitate that?

GF: Well, her grandmama sued me there for custody anyway, but we got it squashed and she was wanting visitation rights on the holidays, Christmas and Thanksgiving and during the summer and stuff like that. To a point, I will probably let her visit in the summer if she wants to, but I can’t foresee Christmas and Thanksgiving. Just simply that the reason is that families should be together on the holidays. After all that is her grandmother. I am still, to tell you the truth, bitter as hell.

MT: Sure.

GF: I can’t look at grandmother without seeing the son so I’ve just got that old bitterness.

MT: Does she defend or deny her son’s guilt?

GF: We haven’t talked about it, but I’m sure, as any mother would if she got around my granddaughter, would try to justify the reason why he killed my daughter. So, that’s one reason why we’re not going to give any consent until after the trial to let her visit with her grandmother. If she does want to call her or something like that, one of us will do that.

MT: Does your granddaughter inquire about her?

GF: When it first happened, uh huh (yes). You know. Me and her talked about it, you know, and I told her right now I didn’t want her visiting with her grandmama or even
talking to her and she pretty much understood, you know, because like you said. We was talking about it a couple of weeks ago. I asked her, "Do you want to call your grandmama or talk to her?" She said, "Yeah, but you don't want me to, do you, Granddaddy?" "No, not right now. Just wait." So, I guess we'll get her get around to let her at least visit or talk to her this summer with a trial or something. Other than that, we're not budging right now as far as giving them visitation rights and stuff and I don't know if I ever will give them visitation as far as her going and spending the whole Christmas with her. I don't know if I'd do that or not unless she gets of age and wants to do it. To live, no, hell no. This thing has really changed everybody's life. It really put my life on hold again.

Although many grandparents continue to hope that their adult child will be able to assume the parental role one day, the reality may be that the grandparent is the only constant parental figure for the grandchild. The parent may move in and out of the child's life, but the full responsibility for rearing the child may well rest with the grandparent. This is one of many difficulties families encounter (Natural Resource Center for Respite and Crisis Care Services, 1998).

As noted, one of the stated criteria for the grandfathers' participation in the study required that the grandparent has to have been raising their grandchild without the child's parent living in the same household. In some cases, a parent may have lived in the home with his or her parent and child on a temporary or sporadic basis. This is more likely the case when the parent, usually the mother, has given birth to the child as a teenager. It follows that these are also families where the grandparent has the grandchild in his or her care for a longer period (6+ years). Respondent 1 and his wife have had her
granddaughter in their care for 14 years; he had this to say about the grandchild’s mother and father:

**Respondent 1**

MT: How is the relationship with the girl’s mother?

GF: Oh, it is fine. We have…it is all right. She has come by the house. We have got a good relationship. She will not listen to [anybody] but she is married now, still having some issues, but it has always been but we would never allow her to have our daughter. She could never have her and never like take her or stay with her – anything.

MT: Does your granddaughter have any relationship or contact with her dad?

GF: Very minimum. He lives in California and he calls. Yeah, he is married, I think. She used to have a few contacts with her grandmother on his side but very little. No, he calls once a year, just every once in a while, and I try to encourage him to be part of her life but he never has been.

MT: Showed no interest?

GF: He shows interest when he is there but not to my level. You cannot come once a year with her Christmas present and not support her anyway. So, I always…he could see her but he could never take her anyplace without me because I did not know him. I knew him but I did not know him and I have a problem with that. He had not earned the confidence of me and now she can do as she wants to because she is old enough and she loves her father just like anybody else but he has never done anything for her. So, they could make no choices for XXXX like school, education, where does she go, where does she not go, where does she work, anywhere. They could make no choices. There was not even a conversation for me to have with them. Their choice was to come and share
with her, show love, gifts, whatever, but you cannot tell me how to raise her because you
gave that privilege up. We are raising her to the best of our knowledge. I do not need
your input anymore on that. That is what you lose...that is what you lost by this child
being in my household because it is confusing for her to try to have a double standard in
front of her and it will not work. So, if they do not like that, they just have to be removed
because the goal is to raise this child up to be a productive person and, if you do not want
to contribute to that, you just have to not be a part of it. Once you take this on, you have
got to hold fast. There is no...see, XXXX never had a choice. She could never get mad
at us and say, I am going to my mother. She never had but there was no option. I am
your parent legally. I am responsible for your whole being so you do not have an option
anymore. Mother gave that up. Sometimes that happens. Parents give it and then all of a
sudden they want to come in and fuss at the grandparents about how they raise the child.
The grandparents have got to understand, “no.” This is not going to happen because it is
frustration. That is why there [were] no visitation rights as far as taking her. Mother
could take her places but not her father. I am going to tell you. I do not want that
confusion in her life until you get a certain age.

In all but two cases, the grandfather was caring for his daughter or stepdaughter's
children. Respondent 5 was caring for his biological son’s son, and Respondent 7 was
helping to care for his stepson’s daughter. In almost every case (7 out of 8), the
grandchild’s father was either unidentified, completely absent or had very little contact
with his child. It was also worth noting that in the families where there was more than
one child in the grandfather’s care, it was likely that the children had different fathers.
This was true for six of the families. This was also the case of families where the siblings of the children in the grandfathers’ care were living with someone else.

**Respondent 2**

MT: Do they have any contact with their father or fathers?

GF: No. One I don't even know where he's at...the baby boy. The other one lives not too far from me, and every once in a while we see him and they know. I tell them go and talk with him.

**Respondent 7**

MT: Does she (the granddaughter) see her dad or have any relationship with him? Any contact?

GF: To be honest with you, it is nothing like it should be. We see less of him now.

**Respondent 8**

MT: Okay, of the kids, the five, seven and eight-year-olds, are they all with the same father?

GF: No, all three different.

MT: All three different. Do any of them have a relationship or do your grandsons that live with you, seven and eight; do they have any relationship with their father?

GF: No, sir.

MT: Do they know them?

GF: No. They just know that there is a father.

In another case, Respondent 5 had a unique situation in that he was caring for a grandchild whose mother had physically abused the grandchild and had her parental rights temporarily revoked. The child’s father (the grandfather’s son) is deemed unfit to
provide care to his own son because he tested positive for drugs. The grandparents were struggling with how much contact the mother should have with the grandchild, despite the court’s directives, as well as how best to facilitate a healthy relationship between the father and the child. Some of his comments are noted here:

**Respondent 5**

MT: So, your son has two children?

GF: Yes, two kids out of wedlock. He is staying with the girl that has his daughter. He tried to get his son but they cannot make a home. They did tests on him and he tested positive for drugs so it left nobody but me.

MT: How does your son feel about you caring for your grandson, especially since he wasn’t able to?

GF: Oh, it was all rosy and everything at first! He was going to do so much and he was going to do this and do that and, “Just help me out, dad”, and had tears.... “I’ll be good with all my heart.” So, we made this deal and he hasn’t held up to it. He just handed off the ball. So he feels kind of guilty because we are his parents and got his kid. So, he does some things when he feels like it.

MT: How often does your son get to see the grandson?

GF: Oh, maybe....now we have to do this very secretly because when he’s at school, this is the only time he can come by my house because he can’t be in the presence of my grandson. The court’s order. I think that they would actually take my grandson because I couldn’t do that. We have to go by the court and let him see his father because his father has the same right as his mother does on Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. I have to take him
everywhere. As a matter of fact, out of the whole year, I’ve missed one time every
Wednesday. One time. And he looks forward to seeing his mother. He’s only a child.

MT: How is that visit arranged?

GF: That’s supervised.

MT: Are you there the whole time or does somebody else?

GF: I take him and then somebody else is there for that one hour.

A few of the grandfathers tell about how the grandchildren’s parent (mostly
mothers) had been in and out of their children’s lives but still not in a position to care for
their children, even if the grandparents are to permit it. This is especially the case with
Respondents 2, 4, 6, 8 and 9. Some of the comments appear here:

Respondent 2

MT: Do you encourage contact with the parent and how do you work that?

GF: I do. I encourage the contact. They need it. The baby is four years old and he
knows who she is when she calls on the phone. Hear her voice. Knows who she is. I
want to know him, I read a story of interest, and he remembered that he was adopted
when he was a child, and he told his wife that he remembered vaguely the little town I
was in. Then one day they decided to go back and he went to that town and some old
men were there and shopping and look over the city and he said, “Do you know, and he
called the family name, and he said yes and he said I know you too. You do have a sister.
He said I do? He said yes.” I know the whole family. I found someone here that really
knows my family? When he come around the old man said I see you brought your sister.
His wife was his sister. He didn't know that. Another man had married and he found out
when they come back they had 4-5 kids. We had good news and bad news. The good
news is we know where your sister is. The bad news is you married her. That hurt him so bad. He loved those children. When we have family reunion or especially a funeral when all the family comes, my son after the funeral when we have the dinner, he go around and look at “who are you” and where are you from and who is your mother? Don't you want to know?

Respondent 6

MT: Wonder if your daughter got herself together and came home today and said, “Uh, I want my kids.” Would you allow it, even though the children are older now?

GM: No way. I don’t think they’d wanna go with her. Because they grew up without her and they know she hasn’t did anything, and they know she ain’t gonna start doing nothin’ now.

GF: So I don’t think they’d wanna go.

MT: Do they talk about her much or desire to have a relationship with her?

GF: Well, they DID, but she done let ‘em down too much...so they know she ain’t gonna do anything.

MT: So, she’s made all these promises over and over again....

GF: Over and over again.

GM: I remember when they was about two or three years old, they could remember real good. Their birthday come up and she promised that she was gonna take ‘em to Chuck E Cheese’s. She ain’t took ‘em to Chuck E Cheese’s yet.

GF: And they haven’t forgotten.

MT: What do you think her deal is? I mean....why has she found herself in the situation that she’s in?
GF: Well, she did it herself 'cause she was the one leaving school. We send her to school and she’d go in one door and come out the other....

GM: And got mixed up with the wrong crowd and on the wrong thing and all that stuff.

GF: Mm...mmm.

GM: She’s strung out. She’s sure strung out.

GF: Mm...mmm. Yeah, I always know when she’s come back. She hollers at me sometime here in the yard when she’s out in the neighborhood. Sometimes she’ll come up and sit and talk with me, but she still ain’t right. I been around too much...I didn’t use it, but I know how people do when they on that stuff...

**Respondent 8**

GF: Now he says, “Daddy, why do I have to do this?” Again, he said, “XXXX likes doing it, you need a wife” and that’s what he is saying now in a joke manner. What he’s really saying though is he wants balance. He wants a mom and a dad so here’s what he’s doing now. Here’s how both of them are surviving. They got me as the dad. They got their grandmama as mama, because mama is not there all the time. But mama has just come back in their life for three weeks, and I gave her too much credit. The first week of January, three weeks straight, she came, I took them to her or either I gave her bus fare to get her back home. She did it for three weeks straight, but I...I gave her too much credit...she hasn’t done like this in a long time, to keep her word. So she kept them, she got them only on the weekends, three weekends straight, and when it got to be that...it’s getting ready to this last month, it was starting in December...and she let me down on that fourth week. See...it’s a thing where she keeps...every time she gets involved with a male, and then she gets her priorities wrong. And she’s got a lot of issues and it’s really
going to take God to take it out. So we talked, we argued this last time, not in front of the boys, but I told her, I said, her name is XXXX, I said, XXXX, I don’t want you calling here and babying these boys anymore. They are not babies. I said, I’m going to tell you something, I don’t want you bringing a male in front of them and doing whatever you do, do you understand? She said, yes. She went against my thing. She did it. She put a man in front of them, and they seen some things that wasn’t right so they told me about it.

MT: Did you confront her?

GF: I confronted her. She got upset with me, said some things that she shouldn’t have said, but, since then, she has…it’s taken two weeks now…but she did call me. I said I’m not going to put these kids in danger anymore. Since you don’t want to step up to the plate to be the mother I’ve been trusting you to be…you’ve got your apartment and going to school and always an excuse. “Daddy, I’m trying, I’m trying.” But, I said, XXXX, I’ve had these boys of yours for almost six years. You have not gave me a nickel of any type of support for them. Just a candy bar or anything. Nothing. But you want me to believe you to give you a chance, it’s going on six years that you’re trying to get your life together, and every time I give you that, the in, you let me down or let them down. She says, well, I’m not trying to please you. I’m trying to please my kids. I said, I understand that, but you keep hurting them. Now they are bigger boys now, and they bring it to me.

MT: Is that right?

GF: They say, “Daddy, how come mommy this, why come mommy that?” I told her that I’m tired of making excuses for you. So, out of that now, the oldest boy is eight years old. He is a mama’s boy. He loves her dearly, and I teach them and been teaching them
for six years that I’ve had them, I said, I don’t want you around talking about your mama to no one and you better not be around nobody letting them talk about her.

Respondents 9 and 10 were the only two grandfathers that indicated that they allowed their grandchildren to occasionally stay with their mother for brief periods of time. The grandparents in these families acknowledge that the grandchildren’s mother’s home environment and lifestyle were definitely less than conducive for the grandchildren in the long-term, but the grandfathers did not want to deny their daughters the opportunity to spend time with their children altogether. Additionally, in Respondent 9’s case, the mother lived with the youngest child’s father, so going to their house provided the boy a chance to see his father as well.

Respondent 9

MT: Do you supervise their visits to the mother’s house? How long do you allow that to happen?

GF: Well, we don’t allow it a lot, but we don’t try to tell the kids that they can’t. We don’t do that. “You can’t go see your mother ever.” As a matter of fact, I even had him call his mom and dad today on the phone and he called his dad and I try to make sure that he’s connected with his dad, however role he is or whatever condition. And, I’m not the dad. I make sure that I don’t try to step in-between. I’m the grandfather. So, what I do is I try to make sure that he goes up to see her, see them, but they smoke. The house is dark. They don’t go outside. The kids come home and their clothes smell like cigarettes and whatever else. So, we try to hold back. “Well, can the kids come up? Well what time do you think you are going to bring them?” We’ll get over there and they’ll say, “Did you bring them anything to eat? Go to the store and pick something up before you
bring them.” Then I’ve got to go the store and that kind of thing. Then they’ll say, “Well Papaw, we didn’t have much to eat up there. Can you get us a sandwich?” McDonald’s is my second home! Every time he gets into the truck or the car and he sees that yellow arch, “Can we stop?” “I’m hungry!” And his grandmother, she’s on him all the time. “We’re not going to stop! You just see that sign.” “There you go! You’re giving into him.” “Well you know!” And, then we have that among ourselves. One’s being hard and the other’s not being, and you know. So, all of this has come into the mix!

And Respondent 10 shared that it is important to maintain the contact with the grandchild’s mother through visits to her house because he had several younger siblings living there. This gave the young man an opportunity to bond with his brother and sisters. Plus, the 16 year-old boy was maturing and was working to improve his relationship with his mother by forgiving her of some of her past transgressions against him as well as being a mentor to his younger siblings.
F-Discipline

The circumstances that bring a child into the care of their grandparents are often potentially harmful and of a high-risk nature. These circumstances can result in various difficulties in child rearing. For instance, children who were prenatally exposed to drugs or who have suffered from abuse or neglect may suffer from physical and/or emotional problems that may make it difficult to provide care for them. This may also be true for children who have lost a parent due to death. In many cases, behavioral problems can also become an issue. These problems often differ by gender. For example, some researchers suggest that boys tend to exhibit behavioral disorders in regards to stressors such as divorce or family break-ups more than girls, while girls tend to internalize their feelings more than boys (Kleiner, Hertzog & Targ, 1998).

Again, there is little information providing any detail on how custodial grandparents deal with the issue of discipline with their grandchildren. It can be inferred from the literature that communication challenges, as well as differences in values between grandparents and grandchildren may often create a certain degree of tension in the household. Several of the grandfathers characterize themselves as strict disciplinarians, but some believe they are limited in their ability to exercise corporal punishment, as it was a method frequently employed when raising their own children. In some cases, children lacked structure and expectations for personal conduct when in a previous environment, which may make it even harder for the grandparents to get their grandchildren to obey and follow rules.

For the most part, discipline was not a major issue for the majority of the grandfathers, but it was a topic that surfaced consistently. However, it played out
differently in every family. There was no grandfather that indicated that he was unable to control his grandchildren or that the grandchildren had behavior that was incorrigible.

In many ways, most of the grandfathers were instituting methods they had used with their own children in order to get them to follow rules and to conduct themselves in the home, school and in the community. Though when an issue, discipline seemed to be more directed towards older boys, particularly teenagers, and to a much lesser extent it was sometimes an issue with girls and younger boys as well.

Several of the grandfathers told of their own childhoods and being subjected to corporal punishment as well as using physical discipline when raising their children. However, a few shared that such a form of discipline was unwarranted or inappropriate for their grandchildren, or perhaps more instructive, current laws and other restrictions dictated by the child welfare system that do not allow corporal punishment under any circumstance. This was often a condition for temporary custody or guardianship.

Grandfathers’ responses for dealing with a grandchild’s misbehavior ranged from denying them a certain privilege to giving a disapproving look to issue a nonverbal reprimand. What was clear was that each grandfather had definite expectations and standards about how their grandchildren were to act and not to act. The disciplinary role was often shared between the two grandparents. In Respondent 9’s case, he believed that perhaps he was too lenient and permissive. His approach to dealing with the grandchildren was very different from that of his wife’s and often served as a source of moderate tension between the two of them. Their love for one another was said to overshadow their personal differences in this area. The following comments from Respondent 9 illustrate this point:
MT: Do differences in how you discipline the grandchildren challenge the marriage a little bit?

GF: Listen! You have to be in love! Okay. Other than that, things like this would tear something apart, but we love each other and we love our children and we want the best for them. We don’t see eye to eye all the time on the kids.

MT: Was that true when you were raising your own?

GF: Well, it was, but you see what happens is that the wife and I are two different people to begin with. I’m what do you call it, a “compassionate” person. She’s not the opposite of compassionate, not the opposite of it, but she is rather on the disciplinary side. Okay, and if I say, “Okay, you can do this”…. “Papaw said I could do this”, or “Dad said I could do this.”….. “Well, I told them…..” Here we go again! We’ll get together and she’ll say, “Now, I’m trying to tell them so and so and you tell them”, and they all like me.” And XXXX, “I want to see Papaw!” If I go off to work, and don’t get home until eight at night, “Papaw! Papaw! Where you been?” And, she’s been with them all day. They act like….and, my sons were the same way as me, and compassionate. It’s just a different communication. The dog even likes me! It’s her dog! That dog is on me! The fish! I got the fish over here! It’s really remarkable! So, that’s the difference that we have. She doesn’t ever ask, “Why do they like you?” It’s not that. It’s just where we have to live together and we have to…you know, we respect each other. Like I said, we’ve been together for 40 some years. It’s been difficult. It has not really been easy.

Conversely, Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 take a more direct approach to discipline. They offer more specific accounts of situations whereby discipline comes into play; some of these are highlighted below:
Respondent 1

MT: If you were in your granddaughter’s head, what would you say that she would think about the impact and contributions you have had on her? From your perspective, what would you think?

GF: I think she would say I am crazy or something. I am hard, too hard, but I think she realized that (if we had not taken her) she would not probably be where she is at now. She may be in some serious problems, some issues, because one of her sisters is pregnant now as a teenager and seeing how her mother lives with her husband, moving, transients, jobs, having some problems. Good girl but just having some problems. I think she realized, boy, I have a place to eat, clean, clothes to wear, etc., and had to put up with Granddaddy because he is hard but I think she would realize that the things she….and, she is involved in church and everything. The structure we gave her in the long run, although distasteful at the time, but long term would be to say, boy, I am glad they were there for me.

MT: You call yourself hard but I am assuming that you require a certain amount of discipline and there is an expectation around behavior for your kids and how they carry themselves.

GF: Yes.

MT: I am sure it applies to her as well.

GF: Oh yeah, it applies to her as well. All of the rules are the same for everyone. Well, our boys are treated a little different. They are boys and they can do a few things. You do not worry about the safety as much as you do girls. So, you are little bit more protective of girls than you are of boys.
Respondent 2

MT: Do you find discipline to be different than it was with your kids?

GF: I have already got ahead of it so all I have to do is look at them; once a while I have to take a hand, but once is enough. I get a belt and my wife don't like it, but I do it. Don't say nothing to me when I discipline them because when children find out you're the ace in the hole by crying, then they don't obey. Daddy was a strict disciplinarian. Military. Daddy was a strict man and we always did things right. We didn't fear him, but we knew we better do right. Teach children to be honest and honorable of others. Respect. Yes ma'am, no ma'am, yes sir, and no sir. I don't care how young your teacher is in school, you do it that way. When you come here, you're in grandma and grandpa's house. When we go to church, you're in the church with grown people, Mr., Mrs., Brother, Sister, whatever their title is. You call them by that. Don't come out with yep or nope. Have respect. When I went off in the services I got to do a lot of things. You respect people and you get a long way. ... Nowadays they look at the TV and look at the games and look at the movies and all of this stuff is out in the open. It's everywhere. The whole thing about the monkey, see no, speak no, and hear no. My four-year-old can tell you everything, where they go and what they do in their own nasty way. I don't allow them that. No bad talking in here. You don't even call your own brother or sister a fool or a dummy or anything. I don't want that. You start on one thing you go on to another. Give an inch and take a mile.
Respondent 3

MT: How would you describe your relationship with both your grandson and your granddaughter and is it any different....I’m sure it is....with him being 17 and her being eight. How would you characterize your relationship with them?

GF: It’s a whole lot different cuz she’s [my granddaughter] is young. The only problem you have with her is that she is spoiled and you don’t want nobody to think that you’re not their for ‘em because they went through a tragic thing, and the biggest problem I have with her right now is the discipline thing on the 8-year-old, but I’m sure that as they get older here, I think the relationship will get a little bit better with her, but my main concern is that the 17-year-old....he get his priorities right and get on with his life. You only get one chance at this, and you know. For me, it’s kind of a second chance of raising kids again so I have a little better idea of what’s good for them and what’s not good for ‘em. You know, I went through it once and you only get one chance to raise your kids, and I’m getting another chance to raise them. So, that’s one reason why I’m kind of so hard on them and it’s created a problem between me and him. I’m kind of old fashioned. There’s a little age problem. It gets pretty tough for ya, but you just can’t give up. You know, you keep tryin’, although it seems like you are bumping your head against the wall sometimes.

MT: Well, did you ever feel that way when you were raising your kids?

GF: No, because I always felt that I was in control. You know, and if they did what was expected of them, and it’s so much different now raising grandkids than raising your own kids because you’ve got these little fellers when they’re so small and they know what to expect and what they can get away with it. What they can’t get away with and what’s my
dad going to allow and what’s he not going to allow. You know. It’s a whole different ball game now. You do a whole lot of talkin’ now. Back then, you did your spankin’ and that was it. They went and sat in a corner and you didn’t have any problems with them. Now, society says that we’re raising them wrong, and you have to do more talkin’ and punishment, and I really don’t know if that works, you know because it seems like to me that you’re losing the kids.

MT: Are there certain things that you take away, or privileges, once one steps out of line?
GF: Well, you know, you have to. I take his car away from him a few times there. You know. I cut down the hours that he’s out. Like I say, does it really do any good in the long run? I can talk to him for two hours and as soon as he gets out here and runs with his friends for two minutes, it seems like all of it’s out the window. Where my kids, it was a little different. They knew not to step over that line because “I’m going to get my butt busted when I get home.” Mark is too old to be beaten on so the only other choice I’ve got is to talk to him and try to understand where he is coming from and hopefully he can understand where I’m coming from because this is his future that he is dealing with here. I hope that within the next couple of years, he’ll settle down and see what’s ahead for him and get on with his life of what he wants to do in life and what’s best for him because you don’t want him to get hung out here with no education. Because knowledge is….there’s so much power in knowledge, and without the education, you’re going to be lost. You can’t get a job. You’re unhappy with your job. You can’t move ahead. You know, and then you want to blame somebody else when it’s your fault. It’s your fault that you didn’t get this education.
MT: Would you say your wife’s approach is any different than yours? Does she have similar challenges? Does she also do a lot of talking or try to get counsel or wisdom? Is she soft?

GF: With my wife, it’s a whole different ball game. The only time that she gets upset is when they are drivin’ her nuts, but other than that, she just makes sure that they’ve got a full belly and get that love and care as a grandma, and like I tell her, “You are going to have to forget the grandmother role and be a parent again.” But, like I said, it’s difficult because we’ve got the other six here all the time and have to be just “grandma” and “granddaddy”. When we brought these two back, then that brought all the rest of them back. Normally they’d be here a half a second and then they’re out.

Respondent 4

MT: Do you think that raising kids is any different now than it was 30 years ago?

GF: Yes, because of a whole lot of things. My son, it wasn’t there for him. These kids have a choice of being involved in it today. Now, his was just…. like the comedies that came on. That was no problem back then for him, but today, you have to watch them. They’ve got some pretty terrible things coming on. You know, this and that. I could sit him down and he could watch comedy programs or some of those kinds of shows, and it was no problem. It was kind of scary and you might find him at the end of your bed at night, but that was no problem.

MT: It didn’t have the violence and the profanity and all that.

GF: Yeah, the shows they have now. It’s a whole lot different and then the kids have a whole of things to face just right outside your door. Everybody was involved in the community that I lived in. Everybody was involved in the raising of your children. For
instance, I had a guy who lived right next door to me and his name was XXXX. There was a gentleman and his wife that lived across the street. They didn’t have no children. But all of our children found their way over to their house because of the way that he and his wife treated the children and they didn’t have no problem with them coming over there playing and everything and if they did something, they would correct them. That’s all. And then they’d let you know, “Well, I corrected your son by doing this”, and it was all right with me! I didn’t have no problem with it. But, today you have to be careful with that because you can end up in some trouble if you correct somebody’s child.

MT: Have you had any discipline problems with your girls?

GF: No, they know practically what I want and what I don’t want, and sometimes I do have to discipline them. Punishment for XXXX, I can do, and that settles her pretty good. XXXX, on the other hand, I can talk to her and then she’ll start crying on me and that takes care of her.

**Respondent 5**

MT: Is your grandson a good kid?

GF: Yes, not a problem. My son….grandson….my grandson, this winter, why he was so active. He has that....

MT: Attention deficit disorder?

GF: Right! He’s on medication.

MT: Okay.

GF: He takes one in the morning, but he is supposed to take it in the evening, but in the evening, we don’t give it to him because it slows him up so much so we tend to let him
get a little loose. We have a very large 3-bedroom house and he takes off running like he was going through it...but he’s doing a good job.

MT: You don’t have much of a discipline problem with him?

GF: No, not now. At first, we did because it was brand new to everybody.

MT: Does he in anyway seem angry or like he has hostility that he is harboring?

GF: I tried one time...one time...no more since I caught myself saying to him, “Just for that, I’m not taking you to see your mama today.” Man! Tears and just...I just couldn’t stand to see him like that. Therefore, “Come on now, Grandpa will take you to see your mama.” That’s the only thing. The courts will tell ya. He was messed up. He was kept out of school a whole week. They called a meeting at school and said we’re going to throw him out.

MT: Is he helpful around the house?

GF: It’s not only looks it’s because this attitude that we do not want. My wife is in the house so she does inspection... I think...wait, he’s not in the army or something. She makes him clean. She does not clean his room. She makes him clean it up and many times he has to go back two or three times. That is what I call a little discipline because I can tell he did not have that home. He did not have that.

MT: Right, how does he respond to that? Does he pretty much get in line with that?

GF: Kind of smug but he does it. He does not want to do it. He did not get away with it. He cannot get away with it.

MT: Right, who would you say is the harder disciplinarian? Your wife or you?

GF: Me.

MT: You? Were you that way with your kids, too?
GF: Yeah, yeah.

MT: And, you mean business?

GF: That is right. The only difference is I have to take from him privileges of no phone
calls, no TV on tonight. I let him go to sleep with TV because he always had that feeling
of...he was kind of new because of the dark. So, TV, some nights I have to take that and
use a night light. You cannot talk to your sister on your phone. Or you cannot talk to her
on the phone tonight. Go to class and we do not interfere while in school or anything to
do with external relationships. We do not stop that but, all of the pleasure things that I
know that he likes, I will take it.

Respondent 7

MT: Are you a strict disciplinarian?

GF: Yeah, I'm softening up. I'm softening up because I feel like, hey, I was thinking
about it. I read the book [the Bible] up there and thought maybe this is what....and, I did
tell her that when you stay with different people, people are going to have different
values, and I told her, "If you stay here, on the weekends, you are getting up and going to
church. You're not going to be in this house and not go to church." You are not going to
lay up on a Sunday morning and not go to church. I go to 8:00 service.

MT: Has she been doing that?

GF: No, most of the weekends, one of her aunts comes and get her.....

MT: So, yeah, she's been able to escape going to church with you because she is
normally away on the weekends. You might appreciate having her away for the
weekends too?
GF: Oh yeah, I do appreciate it! She knows I’m a no-nonsense person. If I find her saying something, my wife is trying to teach her something and she gives her some lip back, I say, “Wait a minute!” Even though my wife don’t want me to do that, I’ll tell her, “Look, don’t talk to me. You be quiet and you listen. I don’t want to hear you giving her any back talk.” Because that’s like I said, she’s got an attitude problem, see. We try to help her, and right now she don’t realize that. But, I let her know, especially with her mother around, I don’t know what happens when I’m not around, but I don’t want to hear her giving no back talk word for word. I’m not going to have it. Not in this house. So, she started getting tears in her eyes.

MT: I can only assume that when you were raising your own kids?

GF: Right, right.

Respondent 6 was dealing with three teenagers (ages 17, 17 and 19), two (twins) of whom have been suspended from school for misconduct. At the time of the interview, their future for continuing at the high school was unknown. Furthermore, my observations of the teenagers’ interactions during my extended visit with the grandparents were that they had little control over the grandchildren’s comings and going as well as the decisions the grandchildren were making.

MT: Do you find your relationship easier or better with your grandsons than with your granddaughter? Or do you relate well to both of them?

GF: Well, it’s pretty good with both.

MT: Is it more difficult with the boys?
GF: Yes. To relate with them...you know...I just talk to my granddaughter pretty good because she’ll listen. She wouldn’t cooperate with me...I don’t think...but she wouldn’t argue back at me.

MT: She wouldn’t argue. And the grandsons will argue with you?

GF: Yeah. They will.

MT: They’re kind of mannish?

GF: Yeah. They’re kind of mannish.

MT: If you had to do this over again...umm...would you decide to adopt your grandkids and raise them? If the situation was the same...would you do it again?

GF: I...I don’t think I would want to fool with it. I got too old now. Yeah. I don’t think I’d want to fool with it no more.

Conversely, Respondent 10 shared that he had virtually no disciplinary problems with his 16 year-old grandson. He maintains that the young man was not only a good student, but he also is cooperative and mannerly.

MT: Do you think he would have been a discipline problem if he hadn’t been in your care?

GF: Yes, since his mother is not too attentive, she’d be more like a sister than a mother, and he would have kind of been loose to the point that when she probably realized it was time to check him out and observe him and try to straighten him out, it would have been a little bit too late.

MT: So, he’s probably much more disciplined?

GF: Yeah, much more disciplined.
G-School and Extra-Curricular Involvement/ Special Needs

Unfortunately, there are no qualitative research studies that I can find in the literature that details custodial grandparents’ involvement in their grandchildren’s education. This was intriguing, as almost every school in the nation has students that are being parented by their grandparents. Most of the anecdotal information about the grandparent’s role in the school is positive, but it was usually told from the perspective that has at least one parent present in the home.

According to Dianne Rothenberg (1999), schools can contribute significantly to helping grandparents cope with the stresses of parenting a second time around. As a basis for understanding and helping, school personnel may need to learn to recognize and accept strong feelings experienced by each member of the grandparent-parent-child triad.

In some instances, the grandchildren in a few of the grandfathers’ care had documented special physical and psychological needs. This, of course, requires additional attention and skills from the grandfathers, and often affects the quality of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. This issue was especially illuminated in a research article on the subject by Heller & Ganguly (2002). Grandparents raising grandchildren with developmental disabilities have been a largely forgotten part of America’s caregiver population. Yet, they likely comprise a large percentage of the grandparents raising grandchildren, as disability was more prevalent in families living in poverty, and in single parent households (Fujiura, 1998). Other factors associated with increased prevalence of disabilities are substance abuse and neglect, which contribute to grandparents taking over the caregiving role.
Grandparenting a child with disabilities includes challenges above and beyond those of other grandparents. Findings from the literature on grandparents not residing with their grandchild with disabilities have indicated feelings of stress, depression and ambiguity concerning their roles as grandparents (Johnson, 1983; Mosala & Ikonen Mosala, 1985; Murphy & Della Corte, 1990, Vadasy et al., 1986).

Janicki, McCallion, Grant-Griffin, & Kolomer’s (2000) study finds that most grandparents caring for grandchildren with developmental disabilities feel overwhelmed by the caregiving challenges. As with other grandparents in these roles they reported high rates of depression (57 percent). Grandparents caring for grandchildren with disabilities have the challenges faced by other grandparents raising grandchildren, including difficulties in finding adequate housing, health care, and educational supports. However, they have additional challenges, such as finding housing that is accessible to persons with a disability. Also, children with developmental disabilities living with grandparents may be ineligible for an individual education plan, if state law provides for it. Respondent I was the only grandfather to identify his grandchild as having “special needs,” but a couple of other grandfathers describe behaviors of their grandchildren that might suggest that they fall into this category.

The ten grandfathers’ level of involvement in their grandchildren’s education and extra-curricular activities was substantially high. Since most of the grandchildren in the study group were school-aged, most of the grandchildren’s days were spent in school. Education was highly valued in these families, as well as the aspirations that the grandfathers hold for the grandchildren’s future. In some cases, the grandparents had seen remarkable improvements or continued success in their grandchildren’s school
performance as a result of having them in their care, as was the case with Respondent 5 and 8:

**Respondent 5**

GF: [He went] from a bad kid to an honor student.

MT: Are you, or your wife, very involved in his school and meeting with the teachers?

GF: Very much. He’s a hell of a student. He flunked the first year because he was detained, taken away from his mother. October the 10th, on my son’s birthday, as a fact, when he got the news, my son cried, and this is when I knew that he meant everything he said. Then in November, he went to a foster home and we just said, “No, this won’t work”, and that’s when I told him we had made the decision of moving and everything. So, we moved into this house. Found it in less than 30 seconds. We couldn’t find a 2-bedroom. We had to get a 3-bedroom. We was in a rush. I did the visit and everything. In January, I think, January the 7th, anyway, we’ve had him ever since then. It was kind of hectic because he would cry at night. He was very deranged. We had sat down and talked about it because he is going from home, to foster home, and then he wasn’t in school. Evidently his mother didn’t give him enough practice at night with homework and things like that. We turned him around. I’m really proud of him. I’m really, really proud of him.

**Respondent 8**

GF: To show you how the Lord has blessed that boy. They called me up two weeks ago Friday, I had an appointment at the school. We had to get up at 7:00...to be at school at 7:00...we get up at 7:00 to get dressed for school, actually 6:00. I feed them breakfast, bathe them, get them ready, and dress them. Two weeks ago informing me that he was
getting an award, a breakfast honor. For the honor roll. And perfect attendance. He was so proud. We had breakfast in his honor at the school so the teachers were all there and other students. He was recognized. They gave him a certificate to go to Penn Station, and I got him, took him there, he had his own little lunch... He was so proud, that was a gift that the school gave him. But what has happened out of this, my grandson was elevated, and now he is doing good in school, and even the lady that is his counselor, she has called me and said, “Mr. XXXX, you are doing a wonderful job with XXXX.” I said, no, the Lord is. I just say the Lord is like that. She calls me about every week to give me a good report, and then everyday, I gotta sign their homework stuff, and they get logs... Like, if they get 0 or 1, they can have a log party, and every Friday they have...that’s a way to honor them for doing good in school. Everyday, he says, “Daddy, I did good in class”. That’s the baby boy so XXXX is coming in everyday and says, “Daddy, I did real good, the teacher had me do dah, dah, dah”...so they each doing real good now in school.

Though I did not query the grandfathers about their levels of formal education or what their educational experiences have been, as this can be a sensitive issue that can potentially compromise the level of rapport between the researcher and respondent, several of them did share accounts about their personal journeys related to education. At least half of the grandfathers made reference to their grandchildren attending college, while some were consulting with the grandchild’s teachers regularly regarding the child’s academic performance and progress, and still a few were seeking additional assistance for special needs that the grandchild might have.
Respondent 10

MT: One of the objectives that you and your wife have is making sure that XXXX is in a good school system and doing well academically, have you been pleased with that, and also, have you been personally involved with the school in terms of either talking to the teachers or going to the parent-teacher conference or any of those things, or your wife?

GF: Yeah, my wife, she’s a very….has a rapport with the teachers. They call her.

XXXX hasn’t been able to take any of the PSATs over at XXXX. With the other grandkids, they don’t call their parents, they call “grandpa” because grandpa is going to go right in there and sit down in the class with them, and they don’t have to be embarrassed. My wife was just over in the class reading to the kids, and so we try. It shows that we are concerned about what happens to them in school and how they are doing. He feels really and truly blessed that, you know, that he is living with us and from the things that have happened in his life, might not have happened if he hadn’t come and gone to school because there are a lot of things that he wouldn’t have had and the things that it would take when you are going to school, clothing and he needed to have someone concerned about your academic status and how well you’re doing. All around, and it has really had a big impact on him, he had the opportunity to see some of my family’s side and all the other kids out there, and if he stays in college, they have their careers and it just makes him say, “I want to be like that. I’m going to be like that.” He has the power to grow up and handle the things in the course of life and it’s how well you prepare yourself. It just depends on what you want out of life.
The issue of having special needs children was one that surfaced with three of the grandfathers. As previously stated, Respondent 1 was the only grandfather to use the term “LD” or indicated that his grandchild had a learning deficiency that had made her school experience difficult and now she was struggling to pursue a career or occupation at the age of 19. His comments on this matter are noted here:

**Respondent 1**

MT: I know you talked about her challenges in terms of school but what is she looking to do career wise or as she continues to mature?

GF: She does not know. XXXX did not graduate. She got a certificate because she was not able to take the graduation equivalency test. Now, she is in a GED here. I am making her…not making her. We are emphasizing that it count. She is not as motivated as she should be so we are trying to get her through that. She does not really know what. The things she thought (she used to say) she wanted to be, she just did not have the ability to do when it comes to education. She lives in our home so she is trying to get her GED, hopefully, so she can go into some childcare field. She is a small girl. She comes and volunteers every day (eight hours a day).

MT: Because she likes kids?

GF: Yeah, she volunteers down here eight hours a day and I have got to the point I have got to make her not come anymore because she is getting comfortable and that is not her number one goal. She has got to get this GED. She is very fearful. She does not have lots of confidence in herself. She needs motivating a lot in that kind of area and then, once she gets this GED thing, I think it will be a big boost for her. Hopefully, she wanted to be a CMA because she passed that test (qualified for that) but she cannot get a job
without...but, that is not what I want her to do because she is small. I do not think she needs to be dealing with people (picking them up and stuff). Childcare would be a better thing. If she got a GED, I would like to see her go to Ivy Tech and get involved in some childcare certification and she would do...she does. She loves kids. That would be a better niche for her starting off. She needs to develop and get more confidence. She might be able to go on and do something else. She always wanted to be a nurse which is kind of what, if she can get those study skills, she just need to do that but, if she can get the GED and then get a little job and hopefully stay in and get the childcare piece and be a certified childcare provider, she can work here. Or, I will not hire her here but she can go some other place and, hopefully, she can go on and get help with Ivy Tech.

A couple of grandfathers state that their grandchildren are either going to be held back a grade or are still in some academic jeopardy, despite the grandparents' interventions and the grandchild’s regular attendance. This was a major concern for Respondents 4 and 9. In Respondent 4’s case, only one of the two granddaughters is experiencing academic difficulty. However, Respondent 9 was particularly concerned that both his 13 year-old granddaughter and 8 year-old grandson were struggling to keep up in school, and the children’s teachers were considering retaining them in the same grade for next year. The grandfather was closely monitoring this situation and in constant contact with the school.

**Respondent 4**

MT: You are quite involved in their schooling, is that right?
GF: Right. I just helped them there earlier this morning. I go about every two to three weeks and check with their teachers and see how they are doing. I don’t want to wait until...

MT: For report cards and...

GF: I want to try to correct it at that time.

MT: And, do you find that their teachers are very cooperative?

GF: Yes they are. Very.

MT: You also talked about the fact that being lonely too due to your wife passing a couple of years back and how has that affected you? Losing your wife.

GF: I’ve had a lot of loneliness, but the children have filled that gap because it takes a lot of time to be with them. When they come in from school, I spend from the time that they get in, from feeding them until about 8:30 in the evening, we are doing homework and doing extra work trying to get things caught up so they’ll feel comfortable when they go back to school and then they know that they can do this and do that. My youngest granddaughter, I have her where she thinks she’s the smartest kid in her class and she do well. The teacher tells me how well she do and that she’ll never have no problem with her. She’s fairly advanced in her class. They wanted to promote her, but I don’t want them to do that. The oldest one is a little slower. It takes more time. She can get it, but it takes a whole lot more time.

Respondent 9 shared how his grandchildren are faring in school and his concerns about their progress; some of his comments appear here:

MT: And are the grandchildren pretty good students?
GF: No, and that’s another problem we’re having. I was sitting here just 24 hours ago
talking to the Sylvan Learning…and they want to send us brochures and what have you.
We will try to enroll them in some type of special education. There seems to be, well,
their attention span is short. It’s just a learning, hard learning process. That’s why I go
to school every day. I have the teacher’s name and number and my cell phone and she’ll
call every day to see how XXXX’s doing. They work with his homework and come
home in the evening and I’ve got to do his homework for him. Matter of fact, we just got
a couple of letters from school saying that they are anticipating retaining them.
MT: Both of them?
GF: Due to the fact that they are not responding. And, that’s a burden. We don’t want
that to happen so I go to the school and I try to talk with the teachers to make sure…..the
thing behind all that is, and you know you’ll hear XXXX say this, “Can I go to my
mommy’s house.” Well, we can’t deny him going over there. Well, there’s XXXX.
“Well, I want to go to Mommy’s house.” She’s 13. Well, he hasn’t been with his mother
like a normal child. It’s kind of like going to a grandparent’s. So, we have to kind of let
them go up there and spend some time with her.

What was perhaps a little more disturbing in Respondent 6’s case was the
grandparents’ fairly cavalier attitude about their twin 17 year-olds being suspended from
school indefinitely. I did not sense any urgency or heightened concern from the
grandparents about this issue, so it was difficult to discern what might lie ahead for these
young people. The grandmother indicated that having transportation to get to the school
to meet with the teachers was a problem at the time, however. Responses from this
family on this particular subject were atypical of other grandparents in the study.
MT: Are any of the grandchildren still in school?

GM: The twins. They both got put out.

MT: Okay. Before they got put out, were you pretty involved in their school in terms of talking with the teachers and doing whatever?

GF: Mm...mmm.

MT: Why did they get put out?

GM: Well, they’re loud...number one. They both act up... and my granddaughter, she’s loud too. They just run around...or when they at school they run up and down the halls when they weren’t supposed to be.

MT: So, what do you think is going to come of that?

GM: Well, I really don’t know yet, but I do know I talked to the counselor yesterday and she wanted me to come, but we don’t have no transportation now so she said she was going to send me a letter to sign my grandson out. I don’t know yet how they’re going to get back in, or IF they’re going to get back in.

Similar to the grandfathers’ varying roles in supporting their grandchildren’s, they too were often responsible for engaging in and supporting a number of extra-curricular activities with which their grandchildren were involved. This often included transporting and/or accompanying the grandchildren to recreational and sports activities, as well as attending church and community events together as a family. A couple of grandfathers admitted that involving themselves in some of these activities, especially those that required more physical exertion, was often more taxing and challenging. This especially applied to respondents 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9:
Respondent 4

MT: Well, they're kids! You mentioned about having to kind of run around and take the kids here and there, including school. Are they involved in any other activities? Church or sports or anything like that?

GF: Well, XXXX was in karate, but we didn't enroll her back in that. That's kind of rough for her. Her mom let her participate in it, and they want her back in it, so I think that we may let her go for basketball or somethin' else once we get a chance here. We're kind of behind the 8-ball this year, getting her involved in stuff this year, but she wants to play some basketball so we'll probably get her enrolled in that next year or so. She was supposed to sign up for this year, but she forgot to turn in the paper in on it so that messed that up. We had her in YMCA for a while there, but like I said, once my wife gets retired, maybe we can get her back into some extracurricular. He has asthma, so it kind of wipes out his sports and stuff. He was into boxing and stuff, but I was kind of glad he quit that because you can wind up kind of punch-drunk from that, and you know with boxing, you have to be a certain type of guy for that. You know. But, he kind of liked it.

MT: He did like it?

GF: Yeah, yeah.

Respondent 5

MT: Do you find yourself doing things now that benefit him more than just yourself or your wife? Like, for example, you are going to school now from time to time or maybe having to take him to an activity or go buy him shoes.
GF: Yes, it is. That is some of the parts that I did not think I would like at first but I kind of look forward to it. I go to all of his school activities, not just some, but all of his school activities and I do surprise him on occasion. We stay on him because, when he started off, he was kind of a little problem child but now that he had time to catch up with the other kids. Reading, he had problems before because when he started school in February, he had been out of school since October. So, he could not be caught up especially in the first grade. So, now, he is ahead of his class because he started off with the rest of the kids. He is on the honor roll all because we got on him.

MT: But, he is doing much, much better?

GF: Much better, much better.

MT: Do you think his mother was as involved in his school as you all are?

GF: She might have tried but she did not have time like my son did not have time. His needs were more important than the child, but now, these young kids around here, they dress just as well as anybody else. They do not think it is kids raising kids. Never stop them. The only thing interesting to my son is tennis shoes - make sure he got the new style. I would never pay $137.00 for tennis shoes. I could make four pair. No, no, no.

MT: You do it differently?

GF: Only thing is that is always, Daddy, I want. Daddy, bring me this, because this is the way my son believes he is feeling loved by giving. That is not giving. See, you need to do what I do. I do not like going to school seeing about football. This is what it is about. Now, I do not mind going to school seeing about schoolwork but the outdoor activities.
Respondent 8

GF: And my boys are looking at me now and are waiting for spring to come so we can go camping. I have to be on a cot this time. I can’t get down on no tent floor. But, I mean, these are things that we’re doing. I mean, they’re talking about right now since I’m driving...I’ve been driving for three weeks...they done plan everything for me. I mean, I’m following through with it, too. Every weekend, we’ve got somewhere to go. You know, we go to church mainly through the weekends. And we usually, like tonight, I usually go to Bible class, and, I mean, that’s the thing that we do all that time, but, other than that, boy, they happy...
H-Finances

Many grandparents faced with caregiving responsibilities are challenged by financial difficulties. Because many elderly people are already living on a low income, taking on the care of a grandchild may put their economic condition at risk. This is especially true of Black, single grandmothers who are in this situation. Some grandparents are forced to make job-related sacrifices, while others, who were comfortably retired, may find greater competition for their funds when they take on the responsibility of their grandchild.

Although there is an increasing number of support groups and organizations assisting this group, there still exists a lack of financial support from the government. For example, many grandparents are denied benefits provided to foster parents based on their blood relation to the child, even though they may be in just as much need. Such inadequate assistance only compounds the grandparents' economic difficulties, and in a sense penalizes them for their willingness to care for their grandchildren (Kleiner, Hertzog & Targ, 1998).

While many grandparents may have been financially stable when caring for themselves, their financial situation may become strained when they take on the care of their grandchildren (Scarcella, Macomber & Geen, 2003). Many grandparents are likely to be retired and live on fixed incomes (Hardin, Clark, and Maguire 1997), unlike other younger relative caregivers who are still working.

According to the authors, Scarcella et al. (2003), grandparent families fare better or as well as children living with other relative caregivers (i.e. aunts, uncles, adult siblings). For example, it appears children living with grandparents are less likely to live
in families facing housing difficulties (31 percent)—either crowding or trouble paying bills—than children living with other relatives (51 percent). Grandparent caregivers may have accumulated more assets, such as a house. Childcare needs also appear to be less in grandparent care arrangements, not surprising given many grandparents are retired.

Nearly a third (30 percent) of children in grandparent care live with low-income single grandparents who work or two grandparents who both work; whereas, 47 percent of children cared for by other relatives live in such families. Yet for those grandparents who do work or who need to return to work to help support the grandchild, finding and paying for childcare can create a financial strain. Children in grandparent care also face similar levels of food insecurity as their counterparts living with other relatives. Notably, about half (48 percent) of children in both groups live in families experiencing food insecurity. With their income constraints, grandparents might have difficulty providing food for an additional child (Scarcella, Macomber & Geen, 2003).

I exercised a great deal of caution and sensitivity when discussing finances, as one’s personal income is a private matter and being too invasive could have been counterproductive in establishing trust and encouraging openness about other issues during the interview. Thus, it was difficult to classify the respondents according to income strata, especially since some were not as forthcoming in offering household income information as others. Since this was not a major focus of the interview and there was no way to verify self-reporting in this area, I was more interested in hearing the grandfathers’ experiences about the financial impact that raising their grandchildren might have for the family, if at all.
Though in no way conclusive, my observations based on the group’s homes, neighborhoods and overall lifestyle would posit that the majority of the families were working/middle-class (non-professional). This is highly subjective, and, of course, middle-income as class is very broad category and does not suggest that these families were without economic challenge. Also, it was difficult to know to what extent the families receiving governmental support for providing care to the grandchildren may or may not have mitigated some of the additional financial responsibility. Some of the grandfathers’ comments on this subject appear below:

**Respondent 1**

MT: At the time, (and, of course, it is a little different in your situation because you had quite a few kids when XXXX came on the scene as well) did you feel any financial brunt? So, you were not eligible for any state support?

GF: Yeah, they had adoption stipend which helped. No, we never felt...she never missed a meal. None of them ever missed a meal. With that many kids, she never missed a meal. I have always been able to...I have just always been blessed to be able to take care of my family. So, she has never been a hardship.

**Respondent 3**

MT: Have you had to really deal with the child welfare system, or what did you have to kind of go through formally in order to....because you have custody of one child and you are in the process of....?

GF: I didn’t have any problems with that. They gave the kids their mother’s Social Security. I didn’t have a problem with that. The only thing that was scary was the insurance thing. That was the only thing that concerned me. How high the insurance was
for them. It was going to cost me like $800 a month to put them on some insurance, you know. That, I couldn’t afford. It was too much money, but the state stepped in on that. You get into this thing when you are looking at a private thing, you get into where you get Food Stamps and all that stuff. I said, “Hey, I can feed them! All I want is that insurance.” I told them that and it was no problem at all, but not at $800.

MT: Yeah, that’s a killer! Do you get any per diem or subsidy through either of the kids through the state?

GF: The only thing I get is the insurance thing. I pay a little premium that I can afford a month.

MT: You are talking health insurance essentially.

GF: Yeah. They can eat beans and potatoes. They don’t have to have Food Stamps and stuff like that. I can take care of them. I couldn’t afford that kind of insurance myself. That’s so high.

Respondent 4

MT: Going back to the early days, what adjustments did you all have to make, either in your living arrangements, or just your life at that time, to adjust to having a small child in the house again?

GF: It was no problem because we always brought somebody’s kids home from church. Her name is XXXX. We are godparents for her and we would bring her, or there was another young lady who was single at the time. She used to live at XXXXnd and XXXX over the top of a little store there, and we brought this little girl home several times, and she cried because her mother was trying to get her to come back home, but they had roaches and so forth in the apartment complex where she lived at and she wanted to stay
here all the time, you know. So, like I said, we always had somebody’s child around the house.

MT: So, it really wasn’t all that new?

GF: Right.

MT: Did you feel any effect or impact financially?

GF: No, I can’t say that I did. It wasn’t no big thing. We just did what we normally did. It was no harder. We always tried to maintain so much food in the house and so forth, but we’d been doing that all our married lives and it was there for XXXX and for the girls. It was just a matter of finding out what they wanted, or what they liked best. That’s what we did for them.

MT: What about when the granddaughters will be old enough and ready for college? Have you thought about their future and what there might be for you financially or planning and kind of preparing them to be young ladies?

GF: Yes. Financially, I have some savings that will help him. Again, by being a disabled veteran, they can go to school in the state of Indiana, but if they choose to go with my son, and he’s in Texas, then they’ll have to pay it, but I’ve got some money set aside and if they want to go....

MT: There will be provisions for that. And, are you hoping that they will want to go?

GF: Yes, I do. XXXX, I don’t have no problem that she’ll go. XXXX is going to be different. I don’t think that she will be college material.

**Respondent 6**

MT: How has taking on the responsibility affected you guys...financially? Has it been a hardship?
GF: No, not really because after we adopted them, we got adoption assistance.

MT: Okay.

GF: We’ve been also living on our social security.

MT: Okay. So, that helps?

GM: That’s helps a lot…but now that they’re gonna turn 18, that’s gonna be cut.

MT: What about their health insurance?

GM: No, they did with Medicaid. They stopped that, but I gotta try to get them back on. They done cut ‘em off. But we’re looking into that.

Just the same, Respondent 5 was probably the most financially vulnerable grandfather compared to his nine counterparts. Again, his custodial care responsibilities were relatively new and came about suddenly as a result of a pending child abuse case involving the grandchild’s mother. The grandfather was already working part-time and relying on Social Security benefits to maintain a fairly modest lifestyle for himself and his wife, but having the responsibility of his grandson had added additional expenses to the household, including higher rent payments as a result of recently moving to a larger space to accommodate the child.

Respondent 7 noted that finances were the least of his concerns about caring for his step-granddaughter, as he believed that he and his wife have more than ample resources to support the grandchild. He was retired and had a small business that he runs from home, and his wife works full-time as a hairdresser. The grandfather, despite his reticence about assuming the custodial role, maintained that the family will be in an even higher income bracket as his business continues to thrive and earn more profits.
Respondent 8 does not state that he was necessarily overwhelmed financially, despite his recent accident and subsequent medical expenses, but he did admit that taking care of his grandsons (without the presence of a wife) was not an easy task given his present physical condition and limited resources. He stated that people often wondered how he was able to provide for his family; and he said that he can only credit his family’s survival to God’s grace. Respondent 10 shared that his family struggled financially from time to time with the added responsibility.

**Respondent 8**

GF: So right now, they give me $197/month…

MT: Each child or both children?

GF: No, sir, both together. And what it is…and I didn’t even know how to use that little card they had, they give you a little credit card, and then half of it is food…

MT: Like a food voucher?

GF: And half of it is cash.

GF: So, it’s still not enough, and I just use that to buy clothes for them and stuff, and I just, now I don’t even worry about it…because the Lord manages for me and I’m going to see what happens, and that’s all I can say is by God, because I don’t even know, with the money that I’m getting, I’m on Disability right now and I’m on Workmen’s Comp. The money that I’m getting is, you would be surprised and say, “how in the world are you…how does it balance out?” and I just say by God. Because I don’t have no money. The money they give me, you can say it ain’t no money because it’s not much, you know. My rent alone take care of…well, it don’t take care of it, to be truth about it, the lights and everything, but I manage and I don’t complain. You know, the boys are happy with
me. We are starting to grow now, like I went to one of my other grandson’s basketball practice last night, dropped in on that, and I went to another grandson’s basketball, dropped in on that, so these boys see now we are getting back to what we used to do.

**Respondent 10**

MT: What, if anything, you mentioned that XXXX was a good kid, has anything been a challenge either financially or otherwise in terms of raising him? Has it been difficult in any way?

GF: Well, it’s been a little challenged financially for us now, but my wife is retired and like I said I’m on pension so sometimes it gets a little tight because with my kids growing, they have a really good appetite. XXXX, he eats a lot! I think we just got it confirmed now that he is able to get free lunches, but for awhile there, he weren’t so that was costing about twenty bucks a week for him to eat.

MT: Is he thinking about any work or summer job or part-time work?

GF: Yeah, yesterday we were talking and he’s always concerned about where he can find work, and I think this summer, you know, he will make some progress in that area. He wants to, with his studies and all, he’s an honor student, and he stays in his books and everything and there’s not too much distraction, so I figure during the summer he’ll probably work, but during the course of the school term, it might be a little difficult for him.

The grandfathers who may have been receiving public assistance in some form as a result of caring for their grandchild, either by way of adoption, foster or kinship care arrangements spoke of exactly how these sources of financial support make the responsibility lighter or more manageable. There were occasional and varying inferences
about how these monies help to some degree to benefit the grandchild, however, but are not nearly sufficient for meeting all of their needs.

**Respondent 9**

MT: So are you able to get any financial assistance for either of them?

GF: No....well, we do get some Medicare, I think, for the kids through...I can’t think of the name of the company, but it’s really not adequate because they base it on our income, the grandparents.

MT: So, they don’t qualify for like Hoosier Health Wise?

GF: The doctor does see over them at XXXX Center, and that is through Health Wise, but as far as the braces....the girl needs braces and we have to do that. Other things that she needs psychological care. We need to have her visit a psychiatrist, a counselor, and they pay portions of that, but we really haven’t explored completely so I can’t say exactly what they do. I decided that I was taking my grandson whether or not I have to put him in a daycare or something or if I’ve gotta work, or my wife gotta’s work. Anyway, I worked with the church, and they have a daycare. Their requirement was that he be potty trained.

MT: Was he a quick study or did it take him a long time?

GF: It didn’t take him very long. I worked with him and got him potty trained. The bad part about that was the cost, and we found out that later, but I just grabbed him up and took him. I’d figure out the finances. I just have to get him out of there. So we would go to her because he would get the check from Social Security for him and for XXXX. It’s bad. I knew I was going to have the boy and I went down and signed up to have my health insurance extended to him. It was $390 a month or something like that. My wife
takes care of it. We went to Social Security together. That just took care of the daycare, barely! That’s not his clothes, not his food. That’s not anything so we had to take money out. It really changed things for us.

MT: Is your wife thinking about, or getting closer, to retirement?

GF: Yeah, she’s thinking about it. Getting close. The only thing is that it would set us back. Yeah, and the money has not been there. I’ve had some savings that I’ve had and had to use. I’m going through financial difficulties that I would not been in, but I haven’t denied them. They shouldn’t have to see my financial crisis and suffer the result of that. They never see that. Sometimes when they ask me how much I make, I don’t want them to think that money grows on trees. It’s not that easy to get so when you do get it, you try to teach them that. But, yeah, financially, it’s been a bind. Of course, like I said, coming from it just being the wife and I, we’ve really enjoyed ourselves. We would go on trips together. We haven’t had to worry about keeping kids anywhere you know. So that’s really hard.
I. Health Condition/Mortality

Some grandparents perceived taking on a parental role late in life as a blessing and are grateful for the opportunity to form a deeper bond with their grandchild. Other grandparents, while enjoying its pleasures, still resented the responsibility and many of the inconveniences that are involved in raising a grandchild. The health effects of raising a grandchild depend on the basic health and vitality of the grandparent. Some grandparents say that raising a grandchild, although stressful and tiring at times, has increased their vitality and zest for life (Caren 1991, Kornhaber 1996). Others say their health is adversely affected (Minkler 1999).

Not surprisingly, given grandparent caregivers’ older age on the average, many have health problems. More children in grandparent care live with a caregiver in fair or poor health or who has a limiting condition than do children living with other relatives (54 and 32 percent, respectively). According to the National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF) data, this means more than half the children living with grandparents have a caregiver with a health condition. This condition may present challenges when caring for the daily needs of infants or toddlers in particular. In fact more young children in grandparent care are taken on few outings (31 percent) than are young children living with other relatives (3 percent). Even raising school-age children can be fairly demanding and require an active caregiver to attend school functions, take children to activities or lessons, or supervise after-school play (Scarcella, Macomber & Geen, 2003).

As noted, the health status of custodial grandparents is one of the factors that has received considerable attention in the professional literature. It could be that since many of the grandparent caregivers nationwide are single grandmothers between the ages of 50-
64, health is particular issue to study as it relates to the grandparent’s ability to care for and support a grandchild. One’s personal health is also factor for custodial grandparents who may also be providing care for a parent (often termed as “sandwich generation”) or another family member who is older.

Again, since there is relatively no data on grandfather caregivers, health information on this particular population is not available in this context. However, there is substantial health data available on African American men of all ages. Whether the data would apply to this group of ten is highly questionable. So instead, I asked grandfathers to share how they would rate their overall health. Then, during the course of the interview, they either volunteered some health issues, or I inquired specifically about how their health has affected the relationship with the grandchild or what role it plays in fulfilling caregiving responsibilities. The Respondent Overview Summary (in the Appendices) indicates that their responses range from fair to excellent.

Since the average age of the grandfathers was about 64 for this group of ten, we do know that some general health data on African American men in the age range shows a higher incidence of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and prostate cancer when compared to whites and other ethnic groups (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). In very few exceptions were these ailments cited by the respondent group as a specific health issue.

However, both Respondents 2 and 5 talked about periods of illness that kept them from functioning in their work or personal lives. In Respondent 2’s case, his heart attack happened suddenly, but he had help from other family members with the children while he recovered, and he stated that his health was quite stable now.
Respondent 5’s health crisis occurred before he and his wife started taking care of their grandchild, but he still had some lingering health conditions, including diabetes as well as a corrective shoe to address a leg bone problem. He managed to still work as a security guard at a local organization. This made his overall condition somewhat fragile, but he did not indicate that it was disabling in any way, especially as it related to caring for his grandson.

**Respondent 5**

MT: How would you say your overall health is? Are you in pretty good condition now?

GF: I am in...yes, I guess I am but I do have diabetes. I do have high blood pressure and I cannot. It is such a long name. I do not have [any] feeling from here down. That is really...I did not know when my leg was broken. First, I broke it here, that is when I was working days. I was shoveling snow. Then, I thought it was fine and I came home, soaked it in some Epsom salt and wrapped a bandage around it and I walked on it. Put the boot on (had some high boots) and put them on and they felt tight. Still not right. Walked on it, walked on it, and did not feel [any]thing, did not have [any] pain. Came back home and I did not even take [a] shot. I just laid there and fell asleep. Got up the next morning, going to change the bandage out, she took the bandage off and saw that I broke the other toe. She called an ambulance. She was scared. She fainted and called the ambulance. They told me I had broken it on both sides.

MT: That you had broken it on both sides?

GF: Yeah, so they put the cast on it and everything but first they had to wait a couple of days for the swelling to go down. Then the swelling went down. They went on heart rate, but since this did happen on the job. So, they would like to put another cast on so
they just going to take me on XX-Xth Street (Dr. XXXX) and, after about six weeks to eight weeks, they said it did not heal properly. So, I had a special boot made for me. MT: A special what? Boot made?

GF: Boot, yeah. It had canes in two parts that fit on one in the front and one in the back where I could not move my foot and just had a little room. So after it heals, they are going to try a walker. I went back to him and he said that my leg bone had slipped down into my foot like this bone here had slipped down - made my leg shorter. Yeah, so that is the way it is now but they said, “Well, we can straighten it back out but you will not be able to pivot”. He said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “Well, I want my leg saved.” I said that I wanted that. But, if I find out ever that I could have that operation and I could feel my feet, I am going to see him.

MT: Is your wife’s health in pretty good condition?

GF: Yeah, it is. No diabetes. Of course, she has been the same size since we met – 110 lbs.

Respondent 8 was probably the most physically challenged grandfather of the study group. He had suffered a major accident while working on the job a little over a year ago that nearly killed him. He said according to the medical professionals, it was a miracle that he was not only alive but that he had made such a remarkable recovery. He was run over by a loaded tractor several times and thrust into a coma with many broken bones and lacerations, which required numerous surgeries and left him immobile and incapacitated for several months, and to this day, there were still lingering effects.

MT: You had mentioned that you had experienced an accident on the job October in 2003.

MT: I’m sure you will always remember that day.

GF: Yeah, yeah.

MT: How was your health condition prior to the accident?

GF: A-1...never been sick a day in my life. Never had to have any medicine. Never had anyone to take care of me, but all that changed October 9th.

MT: How does this affect you caring for the boys?

GF: Friday they gave him [my grandson] a pass [for making good grades] and honored him at the Roller Cave skating rink, it’s a skating rink down the street from our apartment. Now, all of this, to sum it up, physically I’m not able to do this. Physically...

MT: Are you still driving...able to drive?

GF: I just started driving...I’ve been driving for three weeks today. Here’s what happened. My body can’t stand that roller skating, that noise, my bones. I hurt 24/7 if I say so...but, I mean, I deal with the pain.

Though Respondent 6 was the oldest grandfather of the group of ten at the age of 77, he did not cite any physical conditions or health concerns that threaten his ability to care for the grandchildren, notwithstanding that they are almost all young adults. Incidentally, it was only the wife that makes a passing reference to the grandfather having Alzheimer’s. It was difficult to know to what extent his cognitive abilities may have had on how he was able to care and relate to the grandchildren, both past and present. This grandfather, however, spoke about what provisions were in place in the event he and/or his wife were to die or become incapacitated. These were his specific comments:

MT: How would you describe your overall health condition...pretty good?
GF: Well, so far so good now. Looks like I might not make it some days. The older you get...you get a little weaker.

MT: But most days you feel pretty good?

GF: Yeah.

MT: Are you able to do the things you like to do?

GF: Yeah.

MT: Have you ever thought about how they would be taken care of if either one of you had gotten sick or something were to happen to either one of you? What would happen with the kids?

GF: Well...I thought over all of that. I've also talked with my kids. And talked to the oldest one about it. He said, 'Well, don't worry about that. I'll make it. I asked him, 'are you sure you'll make it?' He said 'I'll make it.' Yeah. That's all I can do because I'll be gone. Nothin' I can do.

MT: Do you think about that from time to time?

GM: Yeah. I think about that. At one point, I thought they would out live me, but I ain't too sure now. They ain't gonna make it (laughing)!

Other grandfathers who provided thoughts about plans for their grandchildren following their deaths were Respondents 2, 4, 8 and 9. With the exception of Respondent 9, these grandfathers have special circumstances that precluded the grandmother from assuming the sole responsibility for the grandchild's care due either to her physical limitations, her own death or spousal divorce.
Respondent 4

MT: When you were saying that you share with them that one day you may not be around and you want them to, of course, always have a relationship with their mom, what, if any, assurance do you give them about one, just the fact that they had to deal with their grandmother’s death, and that dying is a part of life. How do they handle that?

GF: They do. They do pretty good. They accept it. They miss her a lot because she was just as much in their life as I am now today and she took them places and we could never find her without them being somewhere even when I was gone to work or whatever. I might be home asleep, but she had them and she had them involved in different things in our church and different things in scouting and so forth. She would try to get them involved, and they enjoyed it. She was just a marvelous person with XXXX and XXXX and now, I try to tell them that that’s just part of life. Everybody is going to die sometime or another, and then when they do, I try to let them know that my son is going to help them if their mother is not around and can’t help them or anything, and more than likely, he probably would take them to Texas, and then I have somebody so that can get them until they are 18 and then I have some that would be available right away that, you know, that would help them to be taken care of.

MT: Sure. Sure. Have you ever discussed that with your son?

GF: Yes, I have. Every detail I have, you know, talked to them about. I have left his kids a little money, but I left more with them because they don’t have nobody in their life but me.
Again, the grandfathers’ responses ranged from having minor health issues to more serious concerns, as reflected in the two statements below:

**Respondent 3**

MT: How would you describe your overall health condition?

GF: Good, I guess! For 60 years old! I’d say it was good. The only problem I have is a little gastric stomach problem, but that’s about it. But, other than that, I can knock on wood.

**Respondent 10**

MT: You had mentioned that you have diabetes?

GF: Yes, I am a diabetic…liver problems. I have Hepatitis-C, which they say that the average person that’s been to Vietnam, they expect that to pop up after about 30 years and it popped up on me. My diabetes came from being exposed to Agent Orange. Oh, I sit down and begged them not to put me on insulin, and they said, “Well, if we can control it this way, we will.” So far, I think it’s real good.

MT: Are you able to engage in any exercise?

GF: Oh, yes! I’m trying to figure out the date where I’m trying to get into a program. Right around the corner, they offered to send me a free trial, so I just finished that up, and really I’m into it. I’ve been exercising all my life. I was a health freak up until I was 40. I always…I had to explain to XXXX the importance of exercise and taking care of your body, you know? If you take care of it, it takes care of you. He seems to get that real good.
J-Housing/Spatial Arrangements

A sudden or unexpected change in housing arrangements can be a difficult transition to make for any family, especially older adults who are looking to accommodate their young grandchildren in their homes. At a time when many are thinking of downsizing space and moving to locations with amenities more conducive to mature adults, some grandparents are having to re-design and re-fit their homes to meet the housing needs of their grandchildren. Additionally, for those grandparent caregivers who are involved with the state child welfare system, (i.e. foster care arrangements), there are certain housing requirements that have to be met. For instance, siblings of the opposite sex under a certain age must have separate beds, as a matter of law if the child welfare system has been involved.

A premier housing complex especially developed for grandparent caregivers and their grandchildren is the GrandFamilies House in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood. It is the first known housing development to have been a response to the growing number of grandparents raising grandchildren in this country with special housing needs. By its fourth year, the program has assisted 175 families. At GrandFamilies House, 26 families comprised of grandparents and grandchildren live in their own apartments. Rents run from $500 to $1,000 a month, although most families qualify for local housing authority assistance.

On site, GrandFamilies House provides a senior fitness class, a Generations Learning Together program run by the YWCA-Boston which offers preschool classes and after-school care, a children's summer camp, a computer learning center and homework assistance. Other services at the facility include a live-in manager,
transportation service for shopping trips, and regular social gatherings. Grandparents who find themselves facing obstacles like inability to place children on their health insurance policies or to enroll them in school have access to an on-site social worker who helps with the paperwork, referrals, obtaining services and finding resources. An AmeriCorp staff member serves as a youth coordinator.

The community consists of "Hope Families," composed of foster/adoptive parents and foster children, as well as "volunteer grandparents" who provide the children and families with mentors, respite workers, babysitters, tutors, allies, and friends in exchange for subsidized apartments and stipends. There are many localities around the country that are in the process of developing similar housing programs, including Baltimore; Buffalo, N.Y.; Chicago; Detroit; New Haven, Connecticut; New York City; and Philadelphia.

Currently, Indianapolis does not have any specialized housing that serves the needs of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Some senior housing complexes, however, are often challenged by some of their grandparent residents needing to shelter their grandchildren, despite the fact that most senior-specific housing communities would have policies that would not allow such a practice. By design, the Boston model seems to cater more toward a single grandparent caregiver and may have little application for a married couple in the same situation, or even a single grandfather in particular.

As might be expected in this study, housing provisions and conditions for these families varied from grandfather to grandfather. However, 9 of the 10 grandfathers were raising their grandchildren in single-family residences, and in five cases, the child’s parent had also been raised in the same home. Also, one of the grandfathers had lived in
the same house and neighborhood for nearly 50 years (Respondent 6). Respondents 2, 3, 4, 8 and 9 all resided in middle-class, predominately African American neighborhoods.

**Respondent 3**

MT: Did you have to make any adjustments in your living accommodations? Space and maybe anything that you’ve done with the bedrooms because it was probably just you and your wife, correct?

GF: Yeah.

MT: And now you have two grandkids living with you. How did things change around the house?

GF: I didn’t have to make any adjustments. My wife did because she had to give up so much closet space, but the only adjustment I got is my garage. I’ve got two grandsons now to keep his junk up. My tools are lost and that’s the biggest problem I have. You know, them getting tools out and not putting them up. I don’t know what happens to ‘em, but tools just up and walk away. I don’t know whether they leave them in their pocket and lose them or what. But as far as, you know, the living arrangement in here, it’s about the same. Before this, the kids were always around anyway. These two weren’t because they was in Louisville, but the other ones [grandchildren] have always been here with us.

Respondent 1 spoke about the need to move to a larger house to accommodate the needs of his granddaughter and children, as he had a large family that continued to grow over the last 20 years. Since his granddaughter was always treated like one of his biological children, she shared a bedroom with one of her aunts. Interesting enough, the aunt would then be significantly **younger** than her niece.
Respondent 1

MT: So, look back 14-15 years ago, when she did come to live with you guys, were there any special accommodations you had to make in terms of living arrangements, any other types of things that helped her to adjust?

GF: No, just we had to get a bigger house eventually. They got older and she stayed with her aunt (which is her sister XXXX) in the room and I just had to make sure that everybody…that there was no difference in XXXX and the rest of them and did not make any difference (the other children). Make sure that we did not show any difference. There was no…that she was a stranger coming into us. So, our family has done a good job at that with the other kids.

Respondent 5 shared that he and his wife needed to have more living space if they were going to respond to the unexpected opportunity to care for their grandson. Monthly rent increased as a result of the move, and the grandparents were also faced with an economic hardship for rent due at his previous residence.

Respondent 5

GF: And, we were living pretty comfortable. We were in a “senior citizen” home. We had to move. Get a larger house. Get a bedroom and extra utilities.

MT: Oh, the accommodations of getting a child in the house. How long ago has it been since you’ve had one of your children living at home?

GF: Since my son was 17. And my daughter went off to college and she never came back home. She found a boyfriend and….

MT: Went on with her life?

GF: Yeah, she’s not given us no problem.
MT: So, it’s been at least probably seven years since you’ve had a child in the house, and even when you did have a child, it was a teenager, or a young man, not a kid. So, how does it feel, or how has it been this last year having a little one around the house?

GF: It’s an adjustment. It’s been more easier on the wife because he knows when she’s gone and I love having him, but at times, he tests my nerves. You know. Because, I haven’t been a well guy all my life and I thought we were through with kids. We have turned him around.

All respondents 2, 4 and 9 had made modifications and renovations to their houses in order to better accommodate their grandchildren living there. In all three cases, the grandfathers had construction and/or carpentry skills that allowed them to perform some of the work themselves. In fact, Respondent 2 was even housing another daughter and her child in the basement in addition to raising five grandchildren whose parents were absent, along with caring for a wife who was physically disabled.

Respondent 7 was currently living in an upscale apartment complex in a suburban neighborhood. He believed that his living accommodations were just perfect for him and his wife, as it provided ample space for his in-home business enterprise needs. Having the step-grandchild in the home over the last six months had been a major inconvenience to him and had impeded his ability to enjoy his home as he would like.

Respondent 7

MT: How has life been different from what it was in August before she came up until now having had her in the household the last few months?

GF: That’s quite different. I had to make some adjustments of where she sleeps at.

That’s where I had my office. My computer. My TV. If you notice, there is no TV in
here, and my office back there was for my computer, fax machine, and I have a what do
you call it, a bed, a couch that lifts right off the bed, but she prefers, with the couch out,
to sleep on my wife’s air mattress. She prefers to sleep on that. It’s been quite a change.
She has to be in the bed early and I can’t go in there on the computer so we have to
switch that around to here. We are talking about it. But, I had all the wiring and stuff in
that room, and the high speed, which is under the carpet, the wiring that goes to the TV
and the DVD and all that stuff. I’ve got to get that switched around. We just have to
make an adjustment for a child. It’s been years and years since I’ve been in a house with
a child.

MT: And, it’s the first time that you and your wife, since you have been married for over
ten years, you all have not had a child in the house?

GF: The only other one we had was one year with her son. My wife had him when she
was 17, and my wife is a lot younger than me. So his last year at school, high school, we
were up in XXXX and he stayed at our house. He was with her all the time, but with my
wife and I being together for about a year, a little over a year that he was in our house.

MT: And of course, he was much older than what the young lady is now?

GF: Oh yeah, and then he went off to college and he wasn’t with us and then he came
back for short periods of time. It wasn’t like a little girl.

MT: Totally different situation!

GF: Yeah! We had to make quite an adjustment. My wife, she has to get up, and she’s
not a morning person, so I can tell that she’s really in to helping this child. She has to get
up early in order to get her dressed and then take her to school. XXXX Township. Then
she has to come back and go to work. My wife works at a hair salon and she has to go
there. A lot of times, I see her and because of the distributorship, I’m out of town a lot. I
go out of town and so does my wife on her job.

Respondent 9 told about the precarious nature of having a young woman in the
house again and the need for there to exercise modesty in her dress and personal
appearance, especially while in front of him. This was expressed in his following
comments:

MT: Now, XXXX at 13 is going into young womanhood. How are you guys preparing to
have those discussions with her about boys and sexuality and all that stuff?
GF: We’ve run into that and I’ve turned that over....

MT: To your wife!

GF: Believe it or not, I’ve got to go get pads! Guess what she tells me, “Papaw.” “What
is it?” “I don’t have any...” “What are you telling me for? Tell your grandmother!”
Well then she’ll go tell her, and I’ll say, “Why didn’t you tell her to start with.” And then
her grandmother will tell me, “Well, can you go to the grocery store?” I’ve got to go the
store, get the ones that’s got the wings!

MT: More information than you needed!

GF: I don’t need all that. So, I get involved with her dressing in the morning. Like I
said, she’s as big as my wife. So, we taught her not to come around Papaw undressed,
wrap up, go to the bathroom; all that stuff. Sometimes she’ll come out, “Well, I’m sorry
Papaw.” That’s readjusting for me because I did the same thing for her mother. It’s all
over again and I was right in the middle with her mother. She didn’t have anything. I
had to go to the store. She’s the same as her mother! Same as her mother! Now, as far
as...I don’t know if she likes boys so much now. She’ll come home and say, “This boy
said this to me”...boy, boy! A lot of the conversation is boys. I know it’s getting around that time and I try to turn her over to her grandmother.
K-Personal/Leisure Time

Taking on a parental role will have effects upon an individual's lifestyle and his or her relationships with family and friends, even if the grandparent has been doing so on and off for some period. As grandparents age, and even without such responsibilities, maturing adults are facing and resolving new developmental issues of their own. The extent of these effects is generally dependent upon the extent of care provided. For instance, grandparents who raise their grandchildren are continuing their parenting role when the preference, once their own children are grown, is normally to relinquish it. Thus, many grandparents report a loss of time for themselves (Kleiner, Hertzog & Targ, 1998).

Once many grandparents' children leave home, many older adults replace their role and responsibilities as a parent with an expanded social network. Social resources are often a determinant of developmental well-being as grandparents age. Also, raising a grandchild often isolates grandparents from this social network since many grandparent caregivers are no longer in the same situation as their friends. The new responsibilities of caregiving often prevent such grandparents from participating in social activities, while friends who are free from parental responsibilities may not wish to include young children in their activities or gatherings (Kleiner, Hertzog & Targ, 1999). Burton, et al. (1995) suggest, however, that the grandparent caregiving role can be normalized for grandparents when other members of their immediate social group are also caregivers.

Many of the grandfathers interviewed spoke of how their personal time had been re-ordered and prioritized such to take care of their grandchildren. Several of the men were involved in sports and recreational activities (bowling, golfing, fishing and
traveling) but were now limited by the available time to engage in them. Some
grandfathers had just extended their activities to include their grandchildren, while others
were refraining from participating in certain activities and outings they once enjoyed.
Doing so had also reordered their plans of how they would spend their life in partial or
full retirement.

Again, this was a subject area whereby the grandfathers interviewed expressed
varying degrees of impact on their caregiving responsibilities. For the most part, this was
a very physically active group of men. Those grandfathers that were retired or semi-
retired seemed to be just as, if not more, busy and on the move as the couples that were
still working a job on a full or part-time basis.

Most of the grandfathers were used to always having children around them and
living in the home, whether their own, or others that they took into their fold. So in many
ways, taking care of grandchildren did not feel much different from what they had
experienced in the past. The difference now seemed to be that several of the grandfathers
were spending more time taking care of the grandchildren than what they may have when
raising their own children. This might be because most of the grandfathers were in the
workforce on a full-time basis while raising their children, and now most of them were
not, and arguably had more time at home or to offer to the grandchildren. This family
arrangement, however, still required careful balancing of time and priorities. This was
especially true when the wife was still employed, which was the case with Respondents
3, 7, 9 and 10.

**Respondent 10**

MT: Does it in any way feel different or strange to have a teenager in the house?
GF: Yes, it does! The wife and I, it was just the two of us, you know, and we were always kind of doing things at the spur of the moment! Going visiting and taking vacations out of town, what have you. So, after having the grandkids, we had to kind of build our schedule around and it would bother him because we couldn’t take him on vacations with us.

Also, by and large, most of the grandfathers were again raising younger children, particularly school-aged children, which may require more engagement of the grandparent depending on the level of need and support that the child may require. This issue was also addressed in the theme section dedicated to school/extra-curricular activities where it discusses the varying levels of involvement that grandfathers have in tending to this area of their grandchildren’s lives.

Since many of the grandfathers were in long-time marriages, much of their leisure time had been spent in activities that often included their spouses and their peers, especially in those cases where their children are adults and/or did not live with them any longer. The increased childcare responsibilities often limited socializing with acquaintances, going on vacation trips according to their personal preferences, and taking advantage of other impromptu opportunities aimed at adult enjoyment. All and all, the respondents did not complain about the sacrifices they were making in this area, as they realized and accepted that giving up some of their personal and leisure time came with the job of being a grandparent caregiver, and that the overall benefits of the responsibility still far exceeded the liabilities.

Just the same, Respondent 4 talked about how he enjoys bowling, which he was still able to do during the day while his granddaughters are in school. But now, as a
widower, he would like to explore some female companionship but having his grandchildren in his full-time care makes this close to impossible. He believed that whatever “dating” he might do would most likely have to include his granddaughters and that this was not optimal to having a romantic relationship. His comments are captured below:

MT: You also talked about the fact that in your current situation, because you have to use your time a little bit differently, that curtails your ability maybe to do certain activities for yourself, like travel, or even maybe have a relationship because of childcare constraints.

GF: Yes, it does because it takes more time for my children, and I just don’t leave them with just anybody and so usually if I go do something, it’s with them. If I go somewhere with someone, if they can’t handle being with my children, then we just don’t mess with them. And so, wherever I go, I let them know up front that my children are part of my life. Wherever I go, they go.

MT: You like to bowl?

GF: Yes, I do! I love to bowl!

MT: How often do you get to do that?

GF: I do it on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in the morning, and that’s after they’ve gone to school and then I’m back home by the time they get back.

MT: And having this outlet, is it a good one for you?

GF: Yes, it is! I have met some interesting people while I’m in the bowling alley. We don’t take life for granted because they are seniors like I am and we greet each other and we know that it’s just not something that happens automatically that we get up in the
morning and so forth. So we all meet and thank God for the time that we can spend with one another.

MT: If you didn’t have your grandkids, what do you think you would be doing with your life? How would you be spending your time?

GF: Life would be dull, I believe! Now that I have them, and to be without them, I think life would be dull. I’d have too much time on my hands.

MT: Do you think you would go back to work or have a part-time job?

GF: No. Not at all. I did my share in the workforce so I wouldn’t go that way, no. I might do some volunteer work and I do some similar at VA Hospital. There is some people that come in and they can’t get to the blood draw by themselves and they have wheelchairs and so forth. They can walk, but a wheelchair is more comfortable for them and so when they come into an area, I meet them and I take them on back to where they need to go to pick up their ride. I do that sometimes. That’s pretty nice too.

Respondent 3’s caregiving responsibilities were assumed suddenly as a result of his daughter’s unexpected death. Therefore, there was not much preparation or transitioning into the custodial role; this new role had dramatically affected this grandfather’s life and lifestyle. He spoke of his affinity toward golfing and traveling, which had now been significantly curtailed because of his caregiving responsibilities. His wife was still working full-time; he was retired but performed some part-time painting jobs. Here are his comments on this particular subject:

Respondent 3

MT: Describe how things, if any, have changed since you started caring for your grandkids full-time. What’s different in your life?
GF: Your life as a family again with small kids. There are things that you don’t do and places that you can’t go because you’ve got that responsibility again, so they just change your life completely. You know. As a retired person, I would get up and go play golf when I wanted to or leave town when I wanted to, but I just don’t have those options now. So, like it changes it back as a family unit again raising small kids.

MT: So you’re not playing as much golf these days.

GF: Well, you know I still play. You know, I still get and play, but like I said, you know it’s just that my wife hasn’t retired and it still takes the responsibility of me getting her off to school in the morning and that takes away that so I can’t go out of town like I used to or jump up and take off. You know when I first retired, hell, I was going to Florida and everywhere. I was living it up, boy! But, when my wife gets retired then she’ll be here with them and I won’t have to be here so much. If she wants to go somewhere, then I’ll stay. You know. We can kind of switch it around, but right now, she’s working so one of us got to be here. You know. He’s big enough to take care of himself. The only worry I’ve got about him is making him come in at night. That’s the only problem we have, man.

Respondent 9 did not go into great detail on this issue, other than to say that he missed the days of when he and his wife were child-free and had more time to spend with one another, or just doing things that he personally enjoyed. Now his activities were ones in which his grandchildren are participating. He did find time to do construction and small projects around the house as his schedule permitted. He also was able to do small jobs as favors to friends and church members from time to time. The grandfather believed that working with his hands helps him to relax. On the other hand, he knew that
his daily routine includes being at home at 3:00 p.m. each day when his grandson got off
the bus and being prepared to give him a snack, followed by the arrival of his
granddaughter soon afterward, and shortly thereafter, a trip to pick up his wife from
work, not to mention all of the morning rituals that took place and the frequent visits to
the grandchildren’s school to meet with teachers about their academic progress. Here
was a highlight of what he immediately faced once he agreed to have the children live
with him:

GF: Right now, I’ve got that job. I have to be home for him. Ten after three he gets off
the bus. I’ve gotta make breakfast. It just turned me into a homemaker….rearranged our
whole life. The money that I’m able to maybe make, I can’t. The kids are there.
Somebody said, “Well, you don’t come to the….” “I have to be home to get XXXX off
the bus.” Everything revolves…talk to the kids, talk to the teachers, and take them to the
doctor. I mean I’m there and they’ll call me because they have my cell phone number
and if anything happens they call me. I’ve gotta run over there. It’s just like raising them
all over again. I’ve gotta go play ball with XXXX. I’ve gotta watch the TV cartoons
with him.

MT: Do you see it to the point that perhaps with you working at GM all those years,
you’re probably doing more legwork with these kids than you did with your own!

GF: Right! Why certainly! These guys here, I mean, they taunt me…. “Papaw this”…Of
course, my oldest kids, they think now that I cater to them too much. Well, like I told
them, I’m not their dad, I’m their grandfather and you have a different mentality when
you become a grandfather. I mean, the desire for the kids are different than mine. Like
even now, as far as whooping, “I don’t have the heart to whoop him!” He wants me to
though! His grandmother will say to him, “I’m gonna whip you boy”, and he’ll say,
“Well, let Papaw whip me.” Well, come on! What kind of whipping am I gonna give
and I’m not even in that mindset anyway. I had raised mine and I whipped my kids. I
raised them. They are fine kids, but, so I’ve gotta be that father all over again and I’ve
gotta make sure that he has the right mindset of me being a male figure in his life. So,
I’ve got to really rearrange…you know, get down on the floor and play with him.

MT: Well, it’s keeping you young, right?

GF: It’s keeping me young! I’m doing it all! You know, bicycling and the things that a
young boy would want to do. He doesn’t have a dad that’s able to do that so he still says,
“Come Papaw!”

MT: How many years that your daughter was not here before you had your grandkids?
You said that she left late.

GF: She left when she was like 28. Well, she had to have XXXX when she was like 38
years and then she had XXXX right after she left, like three years after she left. Like 29
or 30. It’s been about a good ten years.

MT: So you kind of got use to life. Just the calm.

GF: Don’t even bring up those days! The wife and I were just free. We’d go
restaurants. As a matter of fact, she was out of cooking, but now when the kids are gone,
that’s another change.

MT: Do you cook also?

GF: Oh heavens! I cook for her! So really, that’s just turned my life upside down. Right
now, matter of fact, when I get home at 3 or 4, I have to make sure there is something for
supper. He’ll come in the door, “Papaw, where’s my snack!” I’ve got to get him one.
MT: What types of either hobbies or activities do you like to do, or what were you enjoying once you retired and had more time for yourself?

GF: Well, like you see the van sitting out in the yard. It's down right now and I have to get it fixed. That's something. Like my van and I've got a truck, and of course, I just do more like work here. The cabinets, I'm putting in. I just do a lot of work. Use my hands. A one-car garage. Well, you see the TV. I built it in and I put all that in. That kind of thing kept me busy.

MT: So you like staying on the move?

GF: Yeah, and people will call and ask if I can come over and help them if water pipes are stopped up or they need a new light in. Like those two lights there, that one fluorescent light. It's just something I like to do. Well, the kids get in there and get in the way and boy, oh boy! You can't do any of that anymore. You have to go take him somewhere or you have to go do this and you can't go there because you have to be home. Oh boy! And then the neighbor kids come over. We've got a trampoline in the backyard. Those kids come over in the neighborhood and I'm the neighborhood guardian! They'll all come to the house. I've got swings set out in the yard. I put it together. It's just been one thing after another and they like me. I fix the kids bicycles. All the kids will come to my driveway when I'm out there working.
The following paraphrases the respondents' general comments as a group in the 11 theme areas:

A-Nature and Quality of Grandparent/Grandchild Relationship -- all of the grandfathers had definable relationships with the grandchildren, for the most part, were very active and involved in their lives; communicating across the "generational divide" was a particular issue.

B-Formal and Informal Custody -- most of the grandfathers were novices to navigating the child welfare system, and the majority had opted for formal custody, mainly because they wanted to protect their rights and deny the parents the opportunity of obtaining or regaining custody.

C-Spousal Relationships -- custodial grandparenting was often seen as an opportunity to take on the task as a team/joint effort between spouses; these roles had not significantly changed the marriage, though one spoke of compromised intimacy, while other indicated that the role had strengthened their marriage.

D-Support Systems/Spirituality -- none of the grandfathers are in formal support groups or other organized groups for grandparent caregivers; faith most often was the primary resource of support and encouragement in fulfilling their roles as well as connections to other family, church members and peers.
E-Parental involvement/contact-- the role of parents in these families varies but was usually encouraged at some level, mostly with the children’s mothers, and even when the “system” recommended no contact.

F-Discipline-- corporal punishment was often not allowed due to child welfare system- dictated constraints; grandfathers felt somewhat limited in their ability to make their grandchildren obey and fully comply with their directives.

G-School and Extra-Curricular Involvement/Special Needs-- generally grandfather involvement was strong but sometimes more so the grandmother’s responsibility; a few of the grandfathers provided information suggesting that the children in their care might be classified as “special needs,” or had learning deficiencies most often presenting challenges in school.

H-Finances-- the financial impact on the family/household as a result of the grandchild’s care ranged from not to an issue at all to being a considerable burden on the grandparents.

I- Health Condition/Mortality-- most grandfathers rated their health as fair to good, but few were not willing to elaborate much about any serious impairments, though a couple were either recovering from an illness or dealing with a chronic condition.
J-Housing/Spatial Arrangements-- living arrangements do not seem to be much of an issue as far as inconvenience; families made adjustments as necessary, according to the grandfathers, though a couple of grandfathers expressed that they missed having their homes to themselves.

K-Personal time-- caregiving role often restricted personal and leisure time; a number of grandfathers found their engagement in activities such as bowling, fishing, golfing and traveling to be more limited due to their caregiving responsibilities; this is particularly true in the cases where the grandmother was still employed.
CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Perhaps the best way for me to approach this last and concluding chapter of the study is to turn to the eleven major themes that emerge from the interviews--which still leave many unanswered questions and opportunities for exploration and research. In essence, this body of work is only the beginning on much more to be learned about African American grandfather caregivers. Thus, it is not my objective to propose any definitive conclusions about how these views can be universally applied to other grandfather caregivers in general, or African American grandfathers in particular. However, it is my hope to add a layer of interpretation to many of the grandfathers’ comments in this study; therefore, drawing inferences about what might be additional ways to look at custodial grandparenting--both the challenges and benefits grandfathers may experience in fulfilling their roles.

The ultimate goal is to shed light on a growing phenomenon in today’s society, while helping to inform social workers, other practitioners in the helping professions, and policy makers and elected officials about the roles that African American grandfathers may be having in the lives of their grandchildren and their families. I conclude this chapter with a few macro issues that transcend any one theme but really begin to raise the point about how better documenting the role of African American men, and African American grandfathers in particular, can serve as an excellent opportunity to expand the knowledge base and research literature on African American families, as well as custodial grandparenting, both historically and contemporarily.
Though research is not nearly conclusive about what influence or impact custodial grandparenting has on the family unit, authors Kleiner, Hertzog and Targ (1998) make the following observation about the presence of grandfathers in the household based on their studies.

In grandparent-led households, gender is an issue likely to be related to outcomes for both the child and the adult. Some research has demonstrated developmental and behavioral differences between boys and girls, yet it is not known what this means for the grandparent caring for the child. The gender of the grandparent is also likely to have an important influence on the grandchild. Initial research suggests that children tend to benefit from the presence of a grandfather, though the reasons for this are not known. It may be that grandfathers are not only a source of strong affection, but also provide a traditional authoritarian male gender role. The benefit may come from the likelihood that grandfather-headed families have more money available to them. Another explanation may be that the presence of two adults in the home makes for a more stable family and household in many cases (Kleiner, Hertzog & Targ, 1998). These assertions seem to have a great deal of potential merit based on what grandfathers in the study have to share about their experiences.

The first theme, which I labeled "nature and quality of the grandfather/grandchild relationship," is a broad and pervasive construct that aims to describe and explain basically how grandfathers view their roles and how they connect and identify with their grandchildren given the uniqueness of having not spawned the children that they are raising. As previously discussed, all ten grandfathers articulate feelings about their relationship with their grandchildren, and whereas, the level of closeness and intimacy
varied from grandfather to grandfather, as it would any other familial or human relationship, each grandfather is conscious of the fact that there is something expected of him as a grandfather as it relates to the grandchild’s welfare, and in all cases, each grandfather recognizes that the grandchild’s need for proper care and nurturing requires a particular response from him. Moreover, the custodial role felt more natural to several of the grandfathers, for they have been caregivers to a parent or sibling, especially those who are the oldest of several siblings or another relative during the course of their life. How does past caregiving responsibilities of the grandfather factor into his willingness to assume primary care responsibility for his grandchildren and his ability to be effective in this role?

Establishing and maintaining a level of trust and openness with the grandchildren are deemed important by most of the grandfathers. In fact, doing so makes it easier for some of them to have candid conversations about the grandchild’s sexuality and other sensitive matters, despite age, gender and value differences. In general, are these grandfather/grandchild relationships more or less intimate or healthy versus other types of grandparent/grandchild relationships where the child does not live with the grandparents? How do children being raised by a grandmother relate to a grandfather who is accessible but not living in the same household?

Probably the most obvious opportunity to expand this general theme would be to ask specific questions about how African American grandchildren who are living under the care of their grandparents view their relationships with their grandfathers, particularly if he is present in the household. Comparing and contrasting the perspectives from the two unique points of view could be very enlightening. Based on what the grandfathers
shared, it might be expected that most grandchildren would view their relationship with the custodial grandparent as positive and affirming, but not necessarily so. As was noted, many of the grandchildren in their grandparent’s care still very much identify with their parents, particularly their mothers, and may desire to be raised by the parent instead. Or in some cases, the grandchild could be harboring resentment towards the grandparent for stepping in to raise them, thus essentially severing or jeopardizing their relationship with their parents.

And there are, of course, age differences that are even more exaggerated in grandparented-families and may often cause friction and emotional distance between the grandparent and grandchild, thus having the potential of creating a dissatisfying relationship or diminished rapport. Given this possibility, an area to potentially explore might be to assess what, if any, influence does parental involvement have on the quality of the grandparent/grandchild relationship. And similarly, it would be worthwhile to measure to what extent do the circumstances that led to the grandparent assuming the custodial role play in determining the nature and quality of the relationship. For example, do children who were temporarily in foster care or in an institution before coming to live with a grandparent feel more or less positive about their relationship with the grandfather than those whose mother had them when she was still living at home with her parents, thus they have lived with their grandparents for most of their lives?

What role does the age of the grandchild, or the grandfather, play in determining the quality of the relationship? Are there unique differences that can be explained that might typify the grandfather’s relationship with a granddaughter versus a grandson? Does it matter whether the grandchild is the child of the grandparent’s son or daughter,
stepson or stepdaughter? How is role confusion manifested and addressed, or not, in families when grandfathers see themselves more like a grandparent and the grandchild views them more as a parent or vice versa?

Another area for further exploration is the role or influence that formal and informal custody possibly has on the grandparent/grandchild relationship, as well as the grandparent/child relationship and the parent/child relationship. Oftentimes when the custody is informal, the parent of the child temporarily lives with the family or has sporadic episodes of presence or involvement. The family relationships are more fluid and the grandparents are most likely raising the grandchildren independent of the social service system. Informal custody may also deny the grandparents certain rights, and care for the child might be complicated by a lack of access to medical and school records.

When the grandparents have custody under foster/kinship care arrangements, it can give the child, parent or grandparent a sense that the present custodial relationship is temporary and that there is a greater likelihood for reunification with the child’s parents. Adopting a grandchild can be a big step for a grandparent. On one hand, it allows him the legal authority to care for his grandchild very much like that of what is afforded him or her as a parent to a child. On the other hand, it can signify that the parent of the child will no longer have an opportunity to care for the child. This can be a very emotional decision wrought with guilt, fear, resentment and confusion on the part of any or all of the family members involved. What do grandparents see as the pros and cons of choosing any one arrangement, and how informed are they of the differences in the types of arrangements available to them?
More research on how these decisions are made and how they impact different relationships within the family might yield new insights as well. For example, to what extent does the level or potential of financial assistance associated with any one arrangement play in helping grandparents to choose what is the best option? Additionally, how does experience or inexperience with the child welfare system impact a grandparent’s ability to navigate the system when seeking a court decision? Does having a grandfather in the household play a role in child welfare and placement decisions, either positively or negatively? Are African American families more or less likely to choose a particular type of care arrangement than Caucasians or other ethnic minorities?

Notwithstanding that the picture painted by these ten grandfathers is not quite as grave as what is often depicted in the contemporary literature on custodial grandparents, there are challenges that they still face in carrying out their responsibilities. None of the grandfathers however labeled these challenges as stress like what is cited in research studies that seek to describe the caregiving role. Several of the respondents do speak about how trying to raise a grandchild with different values from their own, and with an age difference of more than 50 years in some cases, makes their roles much more complicated. In fact, a few speak of how they are spending most of their time trying to undo or reverse thinking and behavior that have carried over from unhealthy relationships their grandchildren have with their parents.

Even though the professional literature often makes the point that there are a disproportionate number of single grandmothers raising their grandchildren, it too acknowledges that a significant number of custodial grandparents are married, and in
fewer cases, have grandfathers who are assuming the role solely. Given the
preoccupation on single grandmothers for practice interventions and direct support
however, there is no discussion about how the caring for grandchildren can affect one’s
marital relationship. I captured these grandfathers’ views on this subject by labeling
them spousal relationships.

First, the eight grandfathers who are still married often characterize their
caregiving role and responsibilities as a joint effort they share with their wives. Having
grandchildren in their care requires them to cooperate and interact in a way perhaps they
would not have if they were living out their married life without any children in the
household. Now that their own children are adults and have little to no involvement in
the grandchildren’s daily lives, the grandchildren are often the focus of the grandparent’s
attention. Most couples however struggle with balancing the time that they give to their
other grandchildren for which they are not providing primary care.

Again, in Respondent 7’s case, the fact that the grandchild is not of any biological
relationship to him served as a particular problem, mainly because he believes that the
child’s mother or some of her relatives should have assumed the custodial role, as well as
he is displeased that his wife chose to bring the child into their household to live without
his consent. This situation creates a tremendous strain on their marriage. By contrast,
Respondent 10 is helping to raise his wife’s grandson, and he was thrilled to do so. He
felt that it was his responsibility to do so, as his wife had been caring for him before the
two of them married. He believes that his marital relationship is strengthened through the
mutual care they are providing to the grandson.
Perhaps the most dramatic story of them all is Respondent 8’s view that accepting the care responsibility for his two grandsons cost him his marriage. He believes that his ex-wife is unwilling to share this responsibility because she has no biological relationship to them.

The affect that custodial grandparenting has on spousal relationships, as well as other family and non-family relationships, has unlimited potential for further study. It would be interesting to learn more about how the wives of these grandfathers view their relationships with their husbands. Does the quality of the grandparent’s relationship in any way help to influence their grandchildren’s relationships, especially their romantic and marital relationships as they age ultimately to adulthood? Is sexual intimacy compromised once grandparents accept a caregiving role and are co-residing with their grandchildren? Are there cases where the grandparent’s marriage has been saved as a result of becoming joint caregivers? How do support groups and programs for custodial grandparents serve the needs of married caregivers?

An area that is ripe for further exploration is that of spirituality and personal faith, which could range from how grandfathers transmit values and expectations to their grandchildren to what grandfathers identify as the primary source of support to them in carrying out their roles. Ironically, a topic such as this was not even discussed when looking at family systems or individual functioning during my graduate social work education 15 years ago. The social work profession has come a long way in acknowledging spirituality as a factor in client intervention and problem solving, often to the extent that one’s faith dimension can be seen a potential strength or a source of
resiliency, particularly with disenfranchised and disadvantaged populations (Meinert, 2003).

Interestingly enough, most of the grandfathers either play an active role in a local congregation or attend religious services on a regular basis. In fact, with the exception of Respondent 2, all of the grandfathers provide unsolicited information about their religious convictions and/or their participation in church and church-related activities. In all of the nine cases, it is an expectation of the grandfather (and the grandmother in most instances) that their grandchildren also be involved in church, as well as finding ways to develop their own faith and spiritual beliefs with often the support and encouragement of the grandfather.

Likewise, many of the grandfathers speak very openly and passionately about how their own spirituality has served as not only motivation to assume the role of a custodial grandparent, but that it is also the primary source of what sustains them in carrying out the role on a day-to-day basis. To the extent, outside of the role that the grandfathers’ wives or other family members may have played in the care of the grandchildren, they see their personal faiths as what they primarily rely on to inspire and encourage them, both personally and in their roles. This strength helps them in meeting their emotional, social and psychological needs in general, and in relation to properly caring for their grandchildren in particular. This is often the support system of first choice.

With the advent of so many support groups and programs aimed specifically at custodial grandparents, it is worth noting than none of these grandfathers are actively involved in a formal group or receives ongoing services from a social service agency,
except those who may be receiving minimal assistance from the child welfare system, depending on the specific nature of their grandchild's situation. A survey of the local programs that are reaching out to grandparent caregivers would indicate an overwhelmingly number of women as beneficiaries, both those who are single as well as married. What is the extent of evaluation research that exists in this area that measures the effectiveness of support groups and other programs for grandparent caregivers? Do these programs also include support to the grandchildren?

Future research on custodial grandparenting might benefit from looking at what grandparents cite as their sources of support in an effort to reveal how they are persistent and successful in their caregiving roles. Are grandparents with strong faith and spirituality more or less effective in raising their grandchildren than those who are not? In general, what types and levels of support are rendered to these families by churches and other religious institutions? In a few cases, respondents speak of the close relationships they have with a pastor or fellow parishioner that serves as morale support and affirmation. Are support systems for men different for grandfather caregivers than grandmother caregivers based on what each group says or thinks they might need? Assuming that there may be differences, how can social work interventions and other practice interventions be more effective in addressing gender-specific and sensitive issues given the low number of men involved in formal programs for this population of caregivers? Are there lessons to be learned that might suggest that custodial grandparents, especially married one, tend to do better relying on natural supports versus ones from government or nonprofit sectors?
Lastly, since custodial grandparenting is definitely not a new phenomenon in the African American experience, what historically have been the support systems for African American grandparents raising their grandchildren, and, in particular, what roles have African American grandfathers played in the lives of their grandchildren? Also, historically, what role has the African American church as an institution played in the lives of families where a child’s parents were absent but grandparents were present and responsible for the child’s care and well-being?

Again, the health condition of custodial grandparents is not nearly as much an issue with the study respondents as it is portrayed in the current literature on custodial grandparents, which often notes the grandparent’s health as a major factor in grandparent-headed households. Much of this may be credited to the fact that the majority of grandparent caregivers are over the age of 50 and a disproportionate number are African American, single and low-income—all categories that place this group at greater health risks.

By and large, the respondents are not reticent about sharing thoughts about their own mortality as it relates to the future care of the grandchildren they are raising. Mostly, the idea of their dying at some point is not an immediate concern, though several have anticipated such a day and have made some preliminary plans in the event that this would occur. It could have been, since none of the grandfathers deem themselves in poor health or having a life threatening condition, they are less likely to be preoccupied about how their grandchildren would fare in their absence. Also, health concerns might very well be more of an issue for single grandparent caregivers, like Respondents 4 and 9, who were currently providing care to their grandchildren without a spouse.
Just the same, personal health is still an issue with a few of the grandfathers, as a couple of them have experienced serious illnesses, and in one case, an extended incapacitation recently. So, in a way, they are able to test what life is like raising grandchildren when they are not able to function at full capacity or earn a living at the same pay rate. In each case, the grandfather seems to rely on other family members and support from friends and neighbors to help fulfill their caregiving roles during the period of their illness. This too begs the question of just how involved are other family members and the extended community in caring for children in their grandparent’s care? To what extent are siblings of the children’s parents involved in their lives? Does birth order of the parent play any role in how their siblings or other family members involve themselves in the child’s care?

It is difficult to know to what extent certain health care expenses are a factor in family and household finances, as none of the grandfathers talked much about these being a burden or an issue. On the other hand, a couple of the respondents shared that trying to provide for the children’s health is sometimes more the challenge, financially and otherwise. This may have been more of an issue with a couple of the children who are dealing with asthma or in need of orthodontic care. Most health issues for these children focused more on emotional or psychological needs, such as attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity. On one hand, it would appear that grandchildren that are and have been in the care of a grandparent have better health than when they were in the care of their parents, especially if they were in a neglectful, abused or physically unhealthy home, as well as if the parent was negligent in getting them proper medical care. It would also be interesting to know how the health conditions of the children being raised by their
grandparents compare to their counterparts of children being raised by their parents, assuming that the conditions and quality of care are similar.

Additional research could focus on what provisions grandparents have in place to care for their grandchildren in the event one or both become incapacitated or dies. How do these families deal with a grandfather who has Alzheimer’s or some other form of dementia that may threaten their ability to provide safe and adequate care to children, or to himself, for that matter? This may be soon occurring in Respondent 6’s situation; he is 77 and reportedly dealing with some memory loss and confusion. Does assuming the grandchild caregiving role, especially at a certain age and stage, have any adverse affect on a grandparent’s overall health? How many have made estate plans that include care provisions for the grandchildren? How is the issue of the grandparent’s eventual death discussed and addressed within the family? How are the parents of the child involved in any of the discussions or planning about the child’s care in the event that the grandparents are unable of fulfilling their responsibilities?

In general, finances are an issue at some level for most caregivers, whether their resources are inadequate, ample or plentiful. Taking care of children is a cost no matter how one slices it. There are costs associated with just meeting the child’s basic needs of food, clothing and health care, not to mention those related to school, sports, and other extracurricular and recreational activities. As the popular demand for high-priced electronic equipment for personal use and name-brand clothing and shoes increases among young people, many parents and grandparents find it difficult to satisfy not only their parents and grandchildren’s needs, but their wants and desires as well.
Since in the majority of the cases, custodial grandparenting was not a planned event, but rather an opportunity that presented itself and the grandparents were obliged to respond, most grandfathers are not keeping a separate fund on-hand to provide for the grandchildren’s care. Thus, finding ways to support the children through the grandparents’ own means, as well as help from external sources, are very much a part of the custodial grandparent’s world.

In the cases like that of Respondents 1 and 6, they have had their grandchildren in their care for more than 15 years and have raised them since they were first born or very young; therefore, they have more or less assumed the financial responsibilities in ways that now may feel very normal and predictable. This is especially true with Respondent 1, as he raises his granddaughter alongside his seven children in the same household. The fact that a number of the respondents’ wives are still working, and even the grandfathers who are retired are still doing some type of work activity for pay, suggests that their retirement income may not be sufficient to meet not only their personal needs, but also may indicate that it is necessary in order to support the needs of their grandchildren.

Still yet, and despite incomplete household income data, it appears that these grandfathers are better off financially as a group than many of the single, African American grandmothers raising their grandchildren. However, since men on the average earn more than women counterparts and statistics indicate that the majority of the single custodial grandmothers are either unemployed or are low-income; comparing the two groups would most likely show disparities. Additional research about what impact does the presence of a grandfather have on the financial wherewithal of grandparent-headed
household devoid of the grandchildren's parents might be instructive. Are government subsidies considerably less for families were a grandfather is present? Are the grandchildren of these families more or less likely to attend a private school or go on to college by living with their grandparent versus their parent? Are custodial grandparents in a better or worse position, generally speaking, to financially support private school or college, for their grandchildren than the parents of these children? Are some custodial grandparents' financial situation made better off by assuming the role? To what extent does taking on this role delay or postpone retirement, or require a grandparent to return to work?

As the Data Analysis chapter readily pointed out, the value of education resonates with every grandfather when discussing his grandchildren. As a group, their involvement in the grandchildren's school and extracurricular activities is evident and consumes a significant amount of their time. This involvement includes, but is not limited to, selecting a home in a particular geographic neighborhood because of its school system's reputation, transporting the grandchildren to and from school, arranging and participating in grandparent-teacher conference, attending special school-related functions, engaging and assisting in homework assignments, and helping to prepare the grandchildren for college, or at least facilitating their interest in higher education.

Though the respondents are not specifically asked about their own educational attainment, most of them volunteer that they are either lacking a high school diploma, have completed high school and then one went into the military, or in two cases, had attended college—both are returning students having gone later in life. Whatever their individual and collective educational experiences are, they all seem to be very aware of
the need for their grandchildren to receive a quality education. It is as if most of them wanted more for their grandchildren than what they have received. This is expressed in comments regarding concerns for the grandchildren’s future careers. Respondent 6 was less articulate however on this subject than any of the other grandfathers, perhaps because his wife offers her thoughts more explicitly on this issue during my interview with him.

As previously stated, a few of the grandfathers remark that either their grandchildren have special needs or were experiencing problems in mastering their schoolwork. Both of these are of serious concern to the grandfathers, and they are taking actions to ensure that these issues are addressed. In one case, the grandfather is actively involved in looking at vocational education opportunities for his young adult granddaughter with a learning deficiency. And the grandfathers who have grandchildren with either poor grades or at risk of failing are also giving these issues special time and attention, again, with the exception of Respondent 6.

The respondents overall involvement does not end at just school matters but also includes their participation in, and support of, the grandchildren’s extracurricular activities. In addition to taking an active role in education, most of the grandfathers are supporting other activities in which the grandchildren have either shown an interest or are participating. This includes involvement in sports, music, recreational and/or church-related activities at varying levels. Is this more so than when they were involved with their own children? Some of the grandfathers suggest that this was true. Is it because they have more time to tend to these things or perhaps just more interested? Or is the need for adult involvement in school and extra-curricular activities greater with today’s grandchildren than it was for their children in the past?
Additional study in this area might include looking at how a grandparent’s level of education may potentially influence his involvement in, as well as his expectations of, the grandchild’s education and scholastic performance. Do children in grandparent-led households fare better or worse academically than in other family arrangement households? Are grandparents more or less engaged in their grandchildren’s education than other types of adult caregivers, including parents? To what extent do school faculty and administration recognize and encourage grandparents’, and particularly grandfather’s involvement in their grandchildren’s educational process? Do children in these types of families have better school attendance, comparatively speaking? What roles can the parents and other family members of children being raised by their grandparents play in supporting their education?

The preceding areas may be in some ways tied to issues facing the grandfathers as they relate to discipline. Though there were no extreme cases of a grandchild being incorrigible or uncontrolled, the respondents give various accounts of how they are addressing their grandchildren’s behavior and conduct at school at home. Most of the grandfathers speak of the need for the children to be respectful and courteous to adults first and foremost. On the whole, they are also expected to use appropriate language, keep curfew, and dress acceptably. In many cases, these are expectations that had not been in place for the grandchild before coming to live with the grandparent, thus tension between the grandparent and grandchild resulted in a few instances. This is more so the case with teenagers of either gender.

Some of the grandfathers speak of their frustration of not being able to discipline their grandchildren in ways they believe might have more effect due to laws that preclude
them from spanking their grandchildren, in particular. This seems to be more of an issue for the grandfathers who are still more closely tied to the child welfare system. A few lament that modern culture has moved to a point where adults and caregivers have less authority and control over the children than what used to exist, at least in their views. Just the same, the grandfathers use a variety of methods to discipline their grandchildren, ranging from spanking in a very few cases (and almost exclusively male grandchildren, as is the case with Respondents 3, 5, and 6) to just talking to a grandchild sternly when he or she has misbehaved, evoking instant attention.

Is discipline more or a less an issue for grandfathers in their relationships with their granddaughters or with their grandsons? Are parents who are not living in the household still responsible for issuing any discipline with their children? How do children in these families compare to other children as far as school suspensions and expulsions due to misconduct, or bouts with the juvenile justice system for committing criminal acts? How does disciplining of the grandchildren differ from the grandfather to the grandmother? Do single grandmothers see discipline more or less of an issue with their grandchildren than married or single grandfathers raising their grandchildren? Does the issue of discipline contribute to role confusion for grandparent caregivers? Are there values about discipline that are unique to African American families and would serve as a contrast to other custodial grandparents of a different race or ethnicity?

Then there is the subject of parental involvement, which is an issue at one level or another in all of the ten cases. Parental involvement ranges from zero to high according to the respondents. In every case, the grandfather is desirous that the grandchild has some rapport or relationship with their parents, even if it is an occasional visit just to
maintain contact. It also seems that in most situations, the grandchildren wanted to either know who their parents are or have some ongoing contact and involvement with them, regardless of even bad experiences they may have had with the parent in the past. Missing or unidentified fathers is a common occurrence among the grandchildren in these ten families. Several of the grandfathers however are encouraging of the idea of trying to better link the grandchildren to their fathers.

In the interviews, what seems to be most troubling to the grandfathers about a lack of parental involvement is the fact that in most cases the parent does not help to provide any financial assistance whatsoever to the grandparents, and, in a few cases, often make promises about what they will do for the children but leave these promises consistently unfulfilled.

Some of the grandfathers would rather have their grandchildren’s parents assuming the role they are now performing at school, and especially with extracurricular activities. These areas often require special time and energy from the grandparents that might be better borne by a younger person. Just the same, because the parents are not involving themselves in these ways, grandparents assume these responsibilities by default it seems. And though parents of the children are not interviewed for their perspectives on this subject, according to the grandfathers, some the reasons for their negligence or absence altogether include their being unaccounted for indefinite periods of time, drug-addicted and unfit to provide any support, overwhelmed by the responsibilities of caring for other children, incarcerated or otherwise institutionalized, or forbidden to have much of any contact with their children by judicial directive.

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How can grandparent caregivers be effective facilitators of parental involvement that is healthy and affirming to the child? What affect does a missing or dysfunctional parent who continues to be in the life of the family have on the child emotionally or psychologically? What can be done to obtain paternity and to establish stronger bonds between the children and their fathers? How do current programs that promote responsible fatherhood engage fathers of children being raised by a grandparent? Is parental involvement measured by whether the parent is living in the home of the grandparent or not? Are there any best practices in the field that have been established and documented?

For the grandfathers who have taken on the caregiving role fairly recently or have had a lapse of time with no children living in their home, having to share their space with their grandchildren serves as major sacrifice in their living arrangements. For one, the idea of having the home fairly quiet and as a refuge for spending time with a spouse or alone has been replaced with the need to renovate space to accommodate the grandchildren and a competition for use of the bathroom and telephone. As previously stated, a few of the grandfathers had to move to a larger home or modify their current one in order to house their grandchildren properly. This has most likely resulted in added expenses for the grandparents.

The grandfathers interviewed did not express any concerns about the neighborhood communities in which they live. They seem to feel comfortable with their children playing outside and with fellow residents in their peer groups. Just the same, issues such as the grandchildren playing loud or sometimes unacceptable music, or not keeping their room clean or helping out with chores around the house are at play every so
often. Conversely, grandfathers having the grandchildren in their care draw more children (relatives and friends of the grandchildren) to their homes, which was in many cases welcomed by the grandparents. Also, having the grandchildren help out with caring for a younger sibling or a sick family member in the home is also welcomed.

With the exceptions of Respondents 1 and 5, grandfathers generally acknowledge that caring for their grandchildren definitely has reordered and prioritized their time in general. This is especially so with the grandfathers who are retired and enjoy more free time prior to assuming their roles as primary caregivers. For those who have had their grandchildren in their care when the children were very young and are now much older, or those who never have had any gap of time when there was not a child living in their home, it is more difficult for them to identify and appreciate the concept of personal and leisure time. On the other hand, some grandfathers speak of having decreased time for their spouses or friends due to the care responsibilities they have assumed.

For the most part, this is an active group of men, especially since none of them are in poor health and the average age is early 60s. In today’s world, people in their 50s, 60s and 70s who are in fairly good health are often very engaged in social, educational and recreational activities. Such is this case with these grandfathers. Most of them prefer outdoor recreational activities, but a few also enjoy traveling as well as doing home construction projects. Also, several of the grandfathers indicate that their activities have been replaced with ones that include or benefit their grandchildren. And, in some instances, this requires a level of energy or physical skill that they no longer possess, (i.e. camping, basketball or sports that required running). In a couple of cases, the grandfather
notes that these are activities that could be better handled by the grandchild’s parent, if he and/or she were involved.

Additionally, going out to eat, attending church, as well as participating in family events such as reunions, special celebrations, or other occasions, seem to be how many of the grandfathers spend their “free” time. Involvement in their children’s school and overall education consumes a considerable amount of the grandfathers’ time. In fact, for those who are retired, they seem to be spending as much time in several cases, if not more, with the grandchildren as the grandmother, especially if the grandmother is still employed or in poor health.

None of the grandfathers complained about not having more personal time, but there is some lamenting shared about how transporting the grandchildren from here to there, washing clothes, preparing meals, attending grandparent-teacher conferences, and engaging in a number of extra-curricular activities can take its toll on the body and mind. Also, a few grandfathers express that they had no plans for this role and so there was not much to do to prepare for it, especially in those instances where the responsibility was assumed suddenly.

Future research may find that grandparents would rather spend their time raising their grandchildren than pursuing their personal goals. It would be helpful to know if factors such as the grandfather’s ethnicity, socioeconomic class, number of non-family relationships, employment status, marital status or level of interest and participation in hobbies and sports, etc. help to determine how grandfathers perceive a “goodness of fit” with fulfilling their roles. In other words, is the sacrificing of a grandparent’s time to
raise their grandchildren and their feelings about doing so predicated on how they might be situated or by any specific personal characteristics?

Also, is it a safe assumption that custodial grandparenting requires any more of the grandparent’s time than what was required of him or her when raising their own children? Do grandfathers’ believe that they need to offer less time as their grandchildren become older? Are respite services available or even appropriate for grandparents in these families in certain situations? If so, how are they accessed and using what criteria? Is there any difference in the length and quality of time that grandfathers share with male versus female grandchildren in their care? Does carrying out this role provide opportunities for new activities and engagement?

Especially for those who indicate that raising a grandchild is a second chance to nurture and support a young family member, is doing so a welcomed way of spending their time as they age and look back over the course of their lives and what they would like to contribute to an upcoming generation? Several of the men talk about giving back to not only their grandchildren, but also other children in need in their communities, church and families. To what extent and in what specific ways does this occur? Are there certain characteristics that define a grandfather who is more likely to fulfill these multiple roles?

Overriding issues to put forward that go beyond or extend those identified by the preceding themes may provide an opportunity to expand the research on custodial grandparenting, particularly in the African American family; this includes the following: using large samples to document what grandmothers have to say about the roles of their spouses in providing custodial care to their grandchildren; capturing what grandchildren
have to say about how their grandfather caregivers, especially adults who were under their care for significant periods of their childhood; investigating the collective experiences of grandfather caregivers who are sole primary caregivers and have been over a period of five continuous years or more; establishing and expanding practice and service interventions specifically targeted to grandfathers in general, and to African American grandfathers specifically, along with increasing the competence of professional workers to effectively serve this population; exploring ways specifically to engage African American grandfathers more in support groups and other formal support systems especially geared toward them and their peers; and lastly, sharing the contributions of African American males in the family system from a socio-historical perspective to demonstrate patterns over an extended period of time.

Of course, the aforementioned only serve as a beginning as there is so much more to be explored and learned from such a dynamic and complex phenomenon. The implications for public policy and practice interventions are pregnant with opportunity, and most likely there are many more grandfathers that desire a chance to tell their stories about what life is like raising their grandchildren. Doing so can be not only liberating to the grandfathers but also to those who have an interest in finding ways to best support what they have to contribute to their families and to the community as a whole.
REFERENCES


Bloir, K. (2002). What about grandfathers? Human Development and Family Science, Ohio State University Extension, Department of Aging, Columbus, OH.


James, D. E., Extension Family Life Specialist, Grandparents As Parents: Support Groups Ease the Journey, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A&M University.


Ross, M. *Stress and Coping in African-American Grandparents Who are Raising Their Grandchildren*, Center on Aging at the University of Texas Health Science Center, Houston, TX, Volume 5, Issue 5, February, 2002.


Appendix A

Personal Information

Name?

Age?

Marital status? If married, how many years?

Employment status? If retired, how long?

Annual household income?

How many children? Step-children?

How many grandchildren altogether?

How many grandchildren are living with the grandparent?
   Ages?
   Gender of each child?
   How long have they been in care?
   Son or daughter’s child/ren? Both?

Is either of the grandfather’s parents still living? Father and/or mother?

Was the grandfather ever in the care of a grandparent when a child?
Interview Question Guide

What is the primary reason grandparent is raising the grandchild/ren?

What circumstances/situation led to the grandchild’s detachment from his/her parents?

Why did the grandparents decide to take on the role of raising their grandchild/ren?

Do you have legal custody of your grandchild/ren? Through adoption? Through foster care?

How does the grandparent describe his overall health condition?

How does the grandparent describe his relationship with the grandchild/ren in his care?

What have been the greatest challenges in raising the grandchild/ren?

What have been the greatest joys or benefits of being a custodial grandfather?

How has having the grandchildren living with the grandfather affected his relationship with his wife/companion?

What adjustments, if any, have the grandparents made in their home to accommodate their grandchild/ren?

What was the relationship like for the grandfather to his other grandchildren not living with you?

What role does either parent play in the lives of the grandchildren for which the grandparent is primarily responsible?

How has taking the role of custodial grandparent affected the grandparent financially?
What support systems does the grandfather rely on to help in fulfilling his role as a custodial grandparent?

How does the grandfather best describe his contributions or impact on the grandchildren in his care?

Does the grandfather use his time any differently since his grandchild/ren lives with him, versus when not?

How does the grandfather characterize his relationship with his own grandparents (past or present)?

Did the grandfather ever live with a grandparent as a child? If so, was it in the grandparent’s home or that of his parents?
Appendix B

Summary Statistics

General-

Total Number of Grandfathers Interviewed= 10
Total Number of Grandchildren in Grandfathers' Care= 20
Average Number of Grandchildren in Care per Grandfather= 2
Highest Number of Grandchildren in a Grandfather’s Care= 5
Number of Grandfathers with Only One Grandchild in Their Care= 4

Grandfathers’ Age

Average Age= 63.3
Median Age= 62
Mode Age= 68
Age Range= 24 (53-77)

Grandfathers’ Work Status and Military Experience

Number of Grandfathers Retired= 7
Number of Grandfathers Working Part-Time/Full-Time or Self-Employed= 6
Number of Grandfathers with Military Experience= 6

Grandfathers’ Marital Status

Number of Grandfathers Married= 8
Number of Grandfathers Widowed= 1
Number of Grandfathers Divorced= 1
Shortest Time Married= 10 years
Longest Time Married= 47 years
Number of Grandfathers with Wives Still Employed= 4
Time Period Responsible for Grandchild’s Care

Shortest Time Grandchild in Grandfather’s Care = 6 months
Long Time Grandchild in Grandfather’s Care = 19 years

Gender of the Grandfathers’ Child/Step-Child

Number of Grandfathers Raising a Daughter’s Child = 6
Number of Grandfathers Raising a Step-Daughter’s Child = 3
Number of Grandfathers Raising a Son’s Child = 1

Gender and Ages of Grandchildren

Total Number of Male Grandchildren in Grandfathers’ Care = 12
Total Number of Female Grandchildren in Grandfathers’ Care = 8
Youngest Grandchild in a Grandfather’s Care = 4 years-old
Oldest Child in a Grandfather’s Care = 19 years-old (2)
Median Age of Grandchildren = 12.5
Mode Age = 8 years-old (4)
Age Range = 15

Great-Grandchildren

Number of Grandfathers with Great-Grandchildren = 2
Number of Great-Grandchildren Living with the Grandfather = 0
Appendix C

Respondent Profiles

Respondent #1
Age=56
Marital Status=Married (27 years)
Work Status= Employed Full-Time
Health Condition=Very Good
Annual Household Income=$49,000
Number, Gender and Age of Grandchild=1 Girl (19)
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=14 years
Reason for Care=Mother Unfit

Respondent #2
Age=68
Marital Status=Married (41 years)
Work Status=Retired
Health Condition=Good
Annual Household Income=Not provided
Number, Gender and Ages of Grandchildren=3 Boys (15, 13 and 4); 2 Girls (11 and 13)
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=6 years
Reason for Care=Mother Unfit

Respondent #3
Age=61
Marital Status=Married (35 years)
Work Status=Retired
Health Condition=Good
Annual Household Income=Not provided
Number, Gender and Ages of Grandchildren=1 Boy (17); 1 Girl (8)
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=10 months
Reason for Care=Death of Mother (murdered)

Respondent #4
Age=68
Marital Status=Married (42 years)
Work Status=Retired
Health Condition=Fair
Annual Household Income=$40,000
Number, Gender and Ages of Grandchildren=2 Girls (8 and 12)
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=8 and 12 years, respectively
Reason for Care=Mother Unfit and Unwilling
Respondent #5
Age=62
Marital Status=Married (33 years)
Work Status=Employed Part-Time
Health Condition=Fair
Annual Household Income=Not provided
Number, Gender and Age of Grandchild=1 Boy (7)
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=1 year
Reason for Care=Child Abuse (parental rights denied by the court)

Respondent #6
Age=77
Marital Status=Married (47 years)
Work Status=Retired
Health Condition=Fair
Annual Household Income=Not provided
Number, Gender and Age of Grandchildren=2 Boys (17 and 19); 1 Girl (17)
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=6 years
Reason for Care=Mother Unfit

Respondent #7
Age=70
Marital Status=Married (10 years)
Work Status=Retired
Health Condition=Excellent
Annual Household Income=$70,000
Number, Gender and Age of Grandchild=1 Girl (10)
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=6 months
Reason for Care=Mother Not Financially Capable Due to the Number of Children

Respondent #8
Age=53
Marital Status=Divorced (6 years)
Work Status=Workmen’s Compensation
Health Condition=Stable (Recently impaired by a job-related accident)
Annual Household Income=$39,000
Number, Gender and Age of Grandchildren=2 Boys (7 and 8)
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=6 years
Reason for Care=Mother Unfit
**Respondent #9**

Age=64  
Marital Status=Married (39 years)  
Work Status=Retired  
Health Condition=Excellent  
Annual Household Income=$31,000  
Number, Gender and Age of Grandchildren=1 Boy (8); 1 Girl (13)  
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=6 and 8 years, respectively  
Reason for Care=Mother Unfit

**Respondent #10**

Age=54  
Marital Status=Married (10 years)  
Work Status=Retired/Disability  
Health Condition=Fair  
Annual Household Income=$30,000  
Number, Gender and Age of Grandchild=1 Boy (16)  
Length of Time in Grandparent’s Care=10 years  
Reason for Care=Mother Unfit
CURRICULUM VITAE

MICHAEL R. TWYMAN

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy
Indiana University School of Social Work
Dissertation emphasis: Grandfathers raising their grandchildren

Graduate Certificate in Public Management
Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs

Master of Social Work
Indiana University School of Social Work
Planning and Management Concentration

International Studies
London School of Economics, England
Vanderbilt University Fellowship

Bachelor of Arts (Cum Laude)
Fisk University, Nashville, TN
Political Science/Religious and Philosophical Studies

SCHOLASTIC HONORS

Mortar Board Honor Society, Pi Sigma Alpha
Fulbright Scholar
UNCF Scholarship
Who’s Who Among American College and University Students
Outstanding Young Men of America
Indiana University Minority Graduate Scholarship
Graduate Assistant to Senior Faculty

INTERNSHIPS

Indiana House of Representatives
Legislative Intern-Media Division

Indianapolis Housing Authority
Social Work Field Practicum-Case Management Services

Lilly Endowment, Inc.
Planning and Management Practicum-Community Development Division/Youth Programs
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Faculty
Taught graduate-level courses in aging, social policy and executive leadership at the Indiana University School of Social Work (1997-present)

Guest Lecturer
Serves as a resource speaker to graduate-level students in Nonprofit Management and Public Affairs on the subject of fundraising and philanthropy (1999-present)

Internship Advisor
Supervised graduate-level students from the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University (1999-present)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust
Director of Grants Programs-Indiana 1999-present

Leads the professional staff for the second largest private grantmaking foundation in Indiana, with assets of approximately $375 million.

Associate

Contracted independent consulting services to a private development firm for community projects in Indiana and other locations across the country.

Community Action of Greater Indianapolis (CAGI) 1995-1997
Vice President of Operations

Oversaw the delivery of services by a large community-based organization serving low-income, disabled and elderly persons in a four-county area.

City of Indianapolis/Mayor’s Office 1992-1995
Special Assistant to the Mayor/Grants Administrator

Provided direct support to Mayor Goldsmith in carrying out city-sponsored community development projects, with an emphasis on inner-city neighborhood revitalization and human service delivery.
BOARD SERVICE

Current

Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs
   Board of Governors

Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE)
   Program Committee Chair

Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School
   Admissions and Education Committees

Previous

Indiana Grantmakers Alliance (IGA)
   Secretary of Board and Foundation Board

Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention (CHIP)
   Chair and Vice Chair

Habitat for Humanity of Greater Indianapolis
   Chair of Family Support Committee

Planned Parenthood of Greater Indiana
   Treasurer

Horizon House Day Shelter for the Homeless

Dance Kaleidoscope, Inc.

CIVIC AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

United Way of Central Indiana Community Issues Committee

Coalition of Human Service Planning

United Negro College Fund Star Society

National Association of Black Social Workers

Crooked Creek Church- Board of Deacons-Past Chair, Church Moderator- Current

Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives/Indiana Governor's Volunteer and
Community Service Conference- Steering Committee Chair
PRESENTATIONS

Governor Frank O’Bannon Summit on Volunteer Service (2006)
Governor Daniel’s Conference on Service and Volunteerism (2006)
Indiana Youth Institute Kids Count Conference (2005)
Indiana Black Expo Board Retreat (2005)
Lutheran Child and Family Services Case Management Staff Workshop (2004)
Society of Certified Public Accountants- Indianapolis Chapter (2003)
Indiana High School Athletic Association Leadership Conference (2002)
Indiana Grantmakers Alliance Fall Conference (2001)
Prevent Child Abuse of Indiana Annual Conference (2000)

PROFESSIONAL AWARDS

Outstanding Community Service- presented by National Association of Black Social Workers, Central Indiana Chapter

“Forty Under 40” recognition- cited by the Indianapolis Business Journal

Outstanding Board Service- presented by the United Way of Central Indiana

Outstanding Board Service- presented by Habitat for Humanity of Greater Indianapolis

Outstanding Board Service- presented by Planned Parenthood