

Grandparents' Day at Wagner Ranch

By Linda Foley



Linda Foley with grandson Brice in his classroom

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed a proclamation designating the first Sunday after Labor Day as National Grandparents' Day. In a two-year old September tradition at Orinda's Wagner Ranch Elementary, grandparents are celebrated in a big way.

Learning from their grandparents' personal histories, cultures and values enhances children's value systems. Grandparents provide the kind of infrastructure for the youngest generation, only they can provide.

Says Janis Arnerich, principal at Wagner Ranch, "Grandparents enrich children's lives from simple ways such as planting flowers or baking cookies together to grander things such as taking them on trips, plays or to museums. In practical terms, grandparents are an important

part to the school community, even those who live far away. They support our fundraising efforts—buying gift-wrap and making donations—and matching funds through their workplaces. Others participate in volunteering in our school."

This year's visit found us inexplicably arriving in the first grade room twenty minutes early. The fresh-faced native Orinda teacher never missed a beat and encouraged our grandson to show us around the various work and learning stations, praising his creativity. Needless to say, we love her! More adept at our role this time around, we boldly sat on pint-sized chairs and admired his workbooks and the teacher's clever organizational skills—getting ready to scope out the other grandparents.

Other little people entered on cue, shadowed by a number of tentative (first time?) grandparents who undoubtedly felt their grandchild was the best and the brightest. Parents all over again, one generation removed.

The children hunkered down in the middle of the floor, their teacher encouraging each child to introduce his grandpar-

ent/s who then spoke of their professions, their hobbies and their homes. The teacher had an atlas at the ready to show how far one grandparent had traveled from the East Coast. Not to be topped, a child proudly said, his grandparent lived in Concord and came on a bus. We spoke of the importance of foreign languages, dental care, evolution of computers. Everyone learned. Everyone connected.

We moved onto the third grade class, which was conducted in the same manner. This group was not surprisingly more loquacious and energetic. While our grandson actually found three noteworthy things to say about me, he hit pay dirt when he introduced his grandfather saying that he likes trains. The interaction became livelier yet. In due time, a field trip was suggested (could it have been the teacher?) to see the train layout in our house. (The bait for volunteering had been set.)

Our enriching morning concluded in the gym where refreshments were served, a small presentation addressed the fiscal school situation, and opportunities arose to meet other grandpar-

ents—some even owned trains.

Principal Arnerich concludes "All said, we think that grandparents deserve our thanks and an opportunity to learn more about their grandchildren's education". Conversely, grandparents enjoy and value the opportunity to be part of the process.

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