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# Culture Change in Practice

## Grandmothers: You Gotta Love 'Em

Wednesday, June 09, 2004



***"Culture Change in Practice" is our own weblog where people can become involved in a conversation about Culture Change as it is practiced by professionals in real nursing homes. Feel free to join the conversation, or post a comment about something you have learned on your journey.***

**[www.culturechangenow.com/weblog.html](http://www.culturechangenow.com/weblog.html)**

I attended (and presented at) a very interesting conference on June 9 at the MAGEC Summer Institute: "What Does Quality Mean? Long-term Care Quality Improvement for the 21st Century", put together by Robert L. Kane, MD, Minnesota Chair in Long-Term Care and Aging, University of Minnesota School of Public Health. [Click on http://www.hsr.umn.edu/coa/Publications\\_and\\_Reports/Old%20News/oldnews\\_winter2004.pdf](http://www.hsr.umn.edu/coa/Publications_and_Reports/Old%20News/oldnews_winter2004.pdf) for more information (it's a PDF file, so you'll need Adobe's Acrobat Reader if you don't have it already)

The keynote speaker was Dr. Bill Thomas and his topic was the same as his upcoming book, soon to be a best seller, "What Are Old People For?"

Here are some of his introductory remarks:

They're everywhere you know, they're all around us, but what are they for? What are old people for?

You might reply, "They tell us warm and glowing tales of yesteryear," or, "They help us remember our history," "They volunteer at the hospital." But that's really not enough to explain why human

beings live so long.

We're quite masterful at aging. We're the best of all the species at aging well. Humans remain alive and startlingly fit long after cessation of the ability to reproduce. Evolutionary biology says that's not supposed to happen. Even chimpanzees (so genetically similar to us) die shortly after their child bearing days are over. There's something different about humans.

About 1.5 million years ago we're on the plains of Africa, its nighttime and a little child is crying because her mother has just given birth. It was difficult, she lost blood and has no time, energy or ability to go out and get food for her little girl. But wait, the grandma was moved to act. She got food for her granddaughter and comforted her. That's the day we started becoming human.

Human beings flourished in so many ways because we mastered the arrangement of our life cycle: two generations of care rather than one!

### Interesting Stats from a Grandmother Conference

In a study in rural Gambia, mortality statistics for children whose grandmothers had died were

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## Grandmothers, *cont'd*

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actually higher than mortality statistics for children whose fathers had died!

In another study from India, when the maternal grandmother lived in the household, not only was child mortality reduced, but surprisingly the fertility of the mother also increased.

Aging is not something pathetic, a leftover that has to be managed, but one of the central survival strategies of our species!

The Grandmother Effect has been studied among mammals. If a male receives a great deal of touch, affection and fondling, he tends to do better than those who don't. But that's only the start of the story.

Females who were handled gently in their youth, compared to those who were not, grew bigger and stronger. And the offspring of the gentled mammal were more active, curious, and alert! Just think: the effect of your grandmother's love of your mother is in you right now. The gentling that was given you when you were young has improved the health and well being of your children!

What great thoughts these remarks provoke! Share your thoughts with us. [Email us at lavrene@actionpact.com](mailto:lavrene@actionpact.com) and tell us about your grandma. Are you seeing that 'gentling' effect on your children?

Call and thank Grandma today!

Here's a great link for more on grandmothers. <  
<http://www.yorku.ca/crm/Conferences/index.HTM> >

If you enjoyed Bill's comments, be sure to ask for a copy of his new book, "What are Old People For?", coming out this fall and available at your favorite bookstore.

posted by LaVrene Norton at 11:33 AM

