

Down Home: The merits of grandparenting vs. parenting

January 15, 2015

True confession: I'm jealous of my children.

I wouldn't go so far as to say I'm breaking the 10th Commandment—coveting—but jealousy probably is at least its second cousin.

My daughters are raising children. I envy them.

This became clear during the past few weeks, when Joanna and I spent time with both of our girls and their families.

By the way, I haven't told you about our Christmas vacation. It was, in a word, weird.

How we spent our Christmas vacation

We knew we would need to hold our Christmas plans loosely this year. Molly, our younger daughter, and her husband, David, were expecting their first child in Nashville. The due date was Dec. 13. If the baby arrived early or on time, we would be able to go see her and her mama and daddy, then drive back to Buda for Christmas with our older daughter, Lindsay, her husband, Aaron, and our grandson, Ezra, who was about to turn 4. You never want to miss Christmas with an almost-4-year-old.

Molly delivered Eleanor on Dec. 4. Under normal circumstances, that would have been plenty early for a trip to Tennessee and then return to Texas for Christmas with Ezra and his parents.

But these weren't normal circumstances. Jo suffered from shingles when

Eleanor arrived. Eleanor's pediatrician said, "No time with the baby" until two weeks after the shingles cleared. So, we expected to drive down for Christmas in Buda, and then head to Nashville.

Flu bugs and cold viruses

Just before Christmas, Lindsay and Ezra caught the flu, and we couldn't risk catching it, too, and exposing Eleanor. So, we scratched Buda for Christmas.

Then we decided we had time to be good children. We would drive up to see my parents in Oklahoma just before Christmas, arrive back in North Texas in time to spend part of Christmas with Jo's dad and her sisters, and then head east. But colds in both locations nixed that idea.

Fortunately, Jo and I not only love each other, but we also like each other. And we enjoyed a lovely, quiet Christmas Day at home. Just the two of us.

The next day, we left for a week in Nashville, getting acquainted with Eleanor. Later, we spent a weekend in Buda celebrating a late Christmas with Ezra, who didn't seem to mind the delay as he tore his way into a pile of presents.

Parenting was the best of times

Spending all that time with Eleanor and then Ezra reminded me how much I miss raising children and waking up every morning with kids under our roof. Sure, parenting is expensive, chaotic, noisy, stressful, sometimes fractious and almost always tiring. And it was the best time of my life.

I miss family meals and bedtime kisses, reading books out loud and playing games, school events and vacations, packing in the car and driving to church, telling jokes and singing songs. Lindsay and Molly have most of that in front of them. I'm thrilled for them and for Aaron and David. And I'd

do it all over again.

Lots of people say grandparenting is better than parenting. They usually talk about how grandparents can give the children back to their parents when they (either the grandparents or the kids) get tired. They point out grandparenting is less expensive than parenting. And they note grandparents never have to worry about spoiling the children; in fact, that's kind of their job.

And they're right, except for the "better" part. All that intense, can't-let-go-of-it-ness of parenting delivers the depth of joy found in parenting that grandparenting simply can't replace.

But there's one thing that's absolutely better about being a grandparent. It's knowing that my daughters—whom Jo and I love more than life itself—now enjoy the grand privilege, deep exuberance and wild adventure of raising their own children.

God bless them, one and all.