

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator

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Managing alien abductions

Sometimes revisiting the past helps prepare young people for stepping into the future.

Article contributed by Bill Jennings

My grandparents' house is still on the farm. Grandpa worked his orchard for decades. After he retired, my uncle took over, building his own place there. We're lucky, our tribe has got an actual place – 'Gruyere', in Victoria's Yarra Valley. As kids, each of my brothers, sister and cousins used to get their turn in the school holidays up at Grandma and Grandpa's.

Both lived into their nineties. So my kids (daughter, 17 and son, 14) have their own special memories of their great grandparents. When my kids were little, we used to drive up from the city, buy a big family pie on the way and take it up for lunch with Grandma – a little tradition we'd forged.

As a dad, a treasured Gruyere memory happened not long after Grandma died. My then, 11 year-old son and I embarked on an overnight bike journey from the farm to a town called Warburton. We stayed the first night at my uncle's place. We didn't visit the old house. We were still both a bit sad.

On the bike trail, my son talked happily as we rode 40km to our destination. We stayed in the caravan park, had a counter meal in the pub. He felt so grown up, soaking up some dad time.

That's only three years ago but it does feel like a much longer time. Why? Because I reckon that little bike rider was recently abducted by aliens. They left a replacement... similar but slightly hairier, sleepier and mono-syllabic in his utterances. This new version of my son (scientific name – 'adolescent') believes that those same aliens, stole his dad's sense of humour.

We have stepped quickly into role. His peer group's influence has increased exponentially. Concerts, parties, girls... everything's happened quickly. I'm the boundary setter: phone calls to other kids' parents, the checking of plans, the curfews have turned me into possibly the most embarrassing dad ever known. We can get very grumpy with each other.

So where's the hope? Is it just a slog until a healthy adult emerges from his teenage cocoon?

The hope lies in a recent visit back to the farm. Life's busy... hadn't been up for a while. Neither of us had actually been back in the old house. We went inside – together – sat at the kitchen table where we'd shared those pies with Grandma. We found some old newspapers and just sat and quietly read through them

- together. We were visited by a feeling of calm and appreciation of a time past, when things were a little simpler. Then from that 'calm', my son expressed a wish...

"Hey Dad, I reckon it'd be good if we went on another bike ride."

Here's three tips to help you help your adolescent.

1. Keep them connected in your family tribe – it has a story that's older than their peer group.
2. Return to their happy childhood memory places. Revisiting helps them revisit what really matters.
3. If they invite you to spend time with them. Accept. Make the time.

Parentingideas Recognised Expert

Bill Jennings is Australia's leading parent-child program facilitator. As director of Time & Space, Bill offers your community exactly that... 'time & space' for young people and their parents to share important memories and, in doing that, create a new one. Find out more about Bill's mentoring programs at time-space.com.au.



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