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TITLE INFORMATION

GRANDMOTHERING

Building Strong Ties with Every Generation

Kathleen Stassen Berger

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (320 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

A wide-ranging look at the world of grandmothers and grandmothering.

Berger (*The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, 10th Ed., 2017, etc.) is a personal, in-depth examination of the many roles that female grandparents can fulfill in a world of overmanaged children with so-called helicopter parents. Grandmothers, she notes, make the “gears of a family mesh...in harmony”: “They help babies sleep, toddlers eat, preschoolers read, school children study, adolescents find themselves, and young adults become happy and successful.” This wasn’t always the case; as the author points out, “As recently as 1970, half the world’s population was under age 22.” Due to a wide variety of factors, including better nutrition, advances in health care, and dropping birth rates, this is no longer true; now “There are many more grandmothers, and many fewer grandchildren, than in prior generations.” In order to help these grandmothers smoothly acclimate to modern family dynamics, Berger offers them humorous, insightful, and often richly autobiographical advice. However, anybody who has living grandparents will find the book compelling as well. She offers useful tips on being a supportive aide to a pregnant granddaughter (or granddaughter-in-law), and on being a reliable source of infant-rearing help. Berger also addresses urgent situations in which a grandparent’s intervention may become necessary. In general, though, she advocates being a “steady anchor” for parents and grandchildren—both intimately connected and “above the fray,” while offering invaluable support. Any reader who’s been blessed with a wonderful grandmother may find such notions to be self-evident, but Berger shores up her observations with anecdotes and a great deal of engaging research. Her advice to grandmothers is equally specific, smartly advising them of behaviors to embrace and avoid (“Text, don’t call”).

A valuable, compassionate consideration of female elders’ work and worth.

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