

Life can be grand around young ones

Bob Doren, known for his tenacity during his career as a lawyer, is a softy when it comes to his two grandchildren. He visits them in Dallas about four times a year, has easily made the transition from legal argument to baby talk and savors every moment.

"The only thing that isn't overrated is grandchildren," he said.

Bob and I, dear friends despite dramatically different political views, are in lockstep regarding grandchildren.

Watching them grow up is an enormous joy, and helps keep us both strong, grateful and happy.

Both Bob and I lost wives to illness, but Barb Simon and Teri Doren live on proudly and prominently with our grandkids.

Then, with silent, sudden and surreal ferocity came the pandemic.

The choices become even more difficult and complex when grandchildren live out of town.

Everything seemed to change all at once. The ease, flow and spontaneity of being grandparents was compromised by tough questions with no foolproof answers.

Should grandparents stay clear of their grandkids to minimize the possible spread of the virus?

Should they make short visits, but wear masks and maintain a safe distance?

What about grandparents who are counted on to look after the kids so parents can work?

The choices become even more difficult and complex when grandchildren live out of town. Is it reasonably safe to fly, or is the risk of being exposed to the virus too great?

If driving is an option, is there any way to ensure the cleanliness of restrooms, restaurants and hotel rooms that may be part of the journey?



Peter Simon is a former Buffalo News reporter and grandfather of five.

After not seeing his grandchildren for nearly a year, Bob Doren faced those questions head on so he could attend a scaled-back joint birthday party for his grandchildren, Maddie and Jacob.

"In weighing it against the other options, I decided to take the plane," Bob said. "It will take three hours and I'll be there."

I've had lots of decisions to make as well, since two of my five grandchildren live just a few blocks away from me in Williamsville, and three are in Denver.

When the pandemic first hit, I avoided even superficial contact with Nora and Lincoln, my local grandchildren. Instead, they pulled into my driveway with my daughter Jessie for a few minutes, yelled "Hi, Papa" and blew kisses before driving off.

We slowly relaxed the rules, and the kids again enjoy having Papa along for soccer games, swimming meets, dinner and even just "hanging out." Nora shows me her art work and the books she's reading, and Lincoln rattles off the exact scores of every recent pro football game.

My trips to Denver - normally every few months - are on hold. Instead, I keep up with my daughter Becky and her family through frequent FaceTime sessions.

Sabine, their oldest at age 6, is known as "the mayor of Dahlia Street" because she readily engages neighbors in conversations about family, school and work. Sidney loves to line up his toy trucks and help out around the house, and Julian, always sporting a big cheeky smile, began to walk just as he turned 1.

I miss the Denver kids greatly, but am profoundly grateful times five.

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