

We must make children our priority

BY DAVID MCGRATH

Summer is 5, and she addresses me as “Grampy,” especially when teaching me things.

Like when we went swimming last week, and she taught me how our fingers get wrinkly from the water. But she assured me they’ll get better after a while.

Mostly, she teaches me about animals, as with the important lesson after I incorrectly identified her stuffed unicorn as a horse.

“Focus on the horn, Grampy,” she said.

She knows a lot for a kindergartner because she’s always reading. Her mother is an English teacher and her father a writer, and reading preceded even potty training in their household.

There’s not much a plain grandpa can teach her, though I did buy her a fishing pole and have been showing her how to cast. It’s a Zebco reel, and you have to push the button to release the line an instant after the apex of your overhand motion. She learned quickly, not an easy feat of hand and eye coordination for a 5-year-old.

Summer stays overnight some weekends, and upon awakening, usually says she dreamed about elephants, though I think it’s partly because she likes when I press my lips together to blow out their trumpeting sound.

Some mornings she asks for a story, of which I have many, since I am old. I recount adventures with playmates Robert and Joseph when we were nearly her same age. Summer listens hard and is a vigilant fact checker, and I’ve been more careful ever since she asked me to show her some “vampire gold” from one tale, and I could not oblige.

After another story about the Michigan cabin we stayed in 50 years ago, where my brothers Jimmy, using a pillow case, and Kenneth, his cowboy hat, and myself, a bow and suction-up arrow, failed to catch the plump gray mouse running circles in the kitchen, she asked if we could revisit that cabin.

“We need to catch that mouse, Grampy.”

I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention that Summer’s favorite person here is my wife Marianne, whom she calls Mimi, who is not silly, whom she loves to cuddle with, and is the person in charge.

We have fun, though, when Mimi goes for her walk and announces that “Grampy is in charge,” and Summer’s eyes get big, and Grampy winks.

Before leaving, Mimi warns, “And no Bugs Bunny on TV,” and Grampy makes a funny



ABOVE: David McGrath teaches his granddaughter Summer how to cast a fishing rod. BELOW: McGrath and Summer, 5. PROVIDED PHOTOS

face behind Mimi’s back. Summer stifles a giggle but immediately rats me out: “Mimi, Grampy made a baby face.”

For her parents told her it is good to be a tattletale, and she should never hesitate to snitch on the other boys and girls at school, her cousins, or any grownups.

As soon as Mimi’s gone, we find the yoga ball and play soccer in the living room.

It’s so fun because the ball, says Summer, is “ginormous,” and also “humorous” (she has named it Bella), though somebody once kicked it high, cracking a miniature vase. And since Summer is a good girl, she’s upset when something’s broken or spilled and starts to cry, but not too long, since nearly all grampas have fix-it shops in their garages, and I repaired it with a fast-drying marine epoxy so that Mimi would never know.

Occasionally, on cloudy days, after perhaps dreaming of something not as joyous as elephants, Summer nestles in Mimi’s lap for a long time, once or twice peeking over Mimi’s arm at Grampy, reading the paper



across the room. It may take until the sun comes out, or until lunch time, before she warms up and is ready to play again.

Summer’s back home, and I have asked her parents’ permission to write all this down on the occasion of National Children’s Day on June 12, which is freighted with more significance this year after the horrifying school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, exposed our failure at keeping them safe.

Since kids can’t vote, it’s up to us in the upcoming midterm election to cast ballots for those who prioritize the lives of children.

Not only supporting sensible gun control measures to prevent schoolhouse atrocities, but also regarding legislation mitigating childhood poverty, hunger, and homelessness, and supporting universal preschool education, health care coverage and child care.

Nothing has more value than our children. And I’ve never been more acutely aware of that fact than when I was christened “Grampy,” and inspired, loved, and awed by my amazing granddaughter.

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