

Time Will Tell

By Maud Huey Kenyon

I watch my 17-year-old grandson depart for a car trip with his girlfriend, Lora, and her family: a trip with her parents, a 4-year-old and twins who are 2. They will be in a car driving Highway 70 for two days to a lake near Lawrence, Kansas, for a leisurely stay on the water. Then they will drive another two days to Louisville, Kentucky, to visit Lora's grandmother. Sharing the car ride to drop off Lora and my grandson, I listen to Lora talk about her mother's choice of fathers. Lora's father is not her siblings' father. Lora's mom was 18 when Lora was born. Lora recalls talk of domestic violence and jail time for an uncle. I asked, "Where is your dad?" "Dad" is merely a shrug of Lora's shoulders: "He is nowhere, long gone."

Will these two weeks bring a revelation between my grandson and Lora? Will they grow closer? Will my grandson gain some perspective on his relationship with a girl who is his first love and with whom he is intimately involved?

As we arrive at Lora's family townhouse, Lora grows more withdrawn, and her smile fades when we meet her stepfather and stepbrother. Her mother is at the grocery store with the twins. I wonder why her stepdad did not keep the twins with him while his wife shopped for the car trip?

Memories of unwanted high school pregnancies in the 1960s rush back to me. Two of my siblings, both 1950s high school graduates, lived through the era of illegal abortions in America, before Roe v. Wade (1973). Seeing my father's anguish made me determined to spare him another trip to a strange clinic, hoping the procedure would not require additional medical care.

But it is 2026; my grandson's girlfriend has a birth control implant that is effective for three years. The psychological consequences of reproductive freedom bring forward the more practical aspects of a relationship: Do we argue about things we cannot change? Do we enjoy

the same things? Do we laugh together? The relationship becomes more about “Do we get along?” vs. “Do we want to become parents before we are 18?”

As I said goodbye to my grandson, I slipped him money for food for the trip. I am thinking, at least, he will partially pay his way and appear somewhat independent. I am sure I am looking at a 21st Century couple through mid-20th Century eyes. I think their unfolding relationship is fast forwarded with the issue of birth control taken care of. Now they have fewer distractions and can think about: “Do we really like spending time together?”

In high school, I enjoyed riding my bike and discussing politics as much or more than going on dates. I brought my 9-year-old sister on a few of those dates, to shield myself from the pressure of physical involvement. Without birth control, there was no easy way to have a physical relationship. Consequently, not many upper classmen asked me out. I had several male friends who shared their dating adventures with me. Even then, I was a kind of counselor. Earning my Marriage, Family Therapist license in my forties was a logical path for me.

I am glad my grandson is having this adventure with another family. I keep remembering the walks he and I would take in 2009 as I carried him at age two months in my backpack. It was a beautiful California day, and his entire life stretched out ahead of us. Now we are living that life. Time will tell.

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