

It Took Grandsons to Open a Grandmother's Eyes



By Jo Lightfeather, Anishinabe, White Earth
Inspired by her grandsons



My Native American traditional grand-parenting skills have been learned by watching and listening to my husband's mother and other Native grandmothers who walk the Anishinabe Miikana.

Teaching my grandchildren love, humility, self-control, humor, respect, patience, sharing, and many other Anishinabe values comes easily. Teaching them work *usually* comes before play, telling the truth is *always* the best path to take, and letting them know *everyone* makes mistakes, are what I would have wanted my Grandma to teach me when I was little.

I let them know they are *my* grandkids, my love for them is unending and my love is taught by actions more than by words. And kids, well, they know it.

Life is what the Creator gave each of us. It is up to each of us to figure out what to do with each day of Life the Creator has given us. When I am with my grandchildren, my focus is on them. I feel so full of love and have such a sense of fullness of life. To me, in a way, that is what the Circle of Life means. **Life.**

I always listen to my heart - except when it came to smoking cigarettes.

While I have been fulfilling my life's purpose in my parenting, grand-parenting, and in my

work, I have also felt the burden of responsibility of smoking cigarettes which damaged my body and I allowed my grandchildren to witness me smoke.

My way of thinking has been to lead by action. Yet here I was, smoking. I smoked much less when I was around them. But they saw 'Granma Jo' smoke.



My grandsons are now 5, 9 and 10 years old.

In late May, the issue of smoking was still sitting like a stone on my heart. I went to visit my grandsons. As usual, I went outside to 'have a smoke' by the garage.

My 5 year old grandson T.J. came joyfully bounding out of the house with his huge *Granma's-here* smile and chubby rosy cheeks. As carefree as could be, he ran up to me and stopped short.



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His expression changed from his beautiful chubby little smiley face to a disappointed, scowl, with a good bit of hurt and sadness, and a whole lot of mean-face. Instantly he said, *"What's that in your hand? I know what it is. It's a cigarette. My other grandma used to smoke. She doesn't anymore. She's on oxygen now. Cause she used to smoke. She can't travel anymore. Cause she's on oxygen. She can't come to see us anymore. Is that what you want Granma? Huh? Do you not want to come and see us anymore? Is it? Is that what you want? Do you not want to see us anymore Granma?"*

With that he spun around on his heels and ran back into the house as fast as his little legs could go, while I self-consciously stepped on my half smoked cigarette and threw it in the garbage.

I was shocked. As I walked to the door, I felt like I was a 13 year old who had just gotten caught smoking my 1st cigarette behind the garage, except I am 61 and I was caught in front of the garage by a 5 year old.

He was right. Everything I had taught of my grandchildren just came home to roost. The truth was just spoken by my youngest grandson.

I knew he didn't come up with all that on his own. He and his brothers must have been talking about their Grandmas. They heard that smoking was the cause of their other Grandma's COPD, which was preventable. The two older brothers may have even gotten some tobacco prevention education in school.

T.J. was just the one young enough to not have a lot of emotional control yet. When he saw me smoking so soon after hearing that his other grandma could no longer come to visit him at his house because of smoking, he let me have it.

T.J. was the one that 'caught me in the act' and had the words and wisdom at that moment to discharge his emotions.

After that, every time, I lit up a cigarette, I saw his scowl, disappointment, hurt, and mean face. Since I couldn't quit smoking for myself, I decided to quit smoking for my grandsons.

In early June, I sat down with T.J. I told him, "T.J. remember last time I was here and you came outside and I was smoking?" T.J. nods, "Yes." A mean scowl came over his face. "Well, I heard you. And I saw how upset you were. I think your brothers are just as upset as you are about Granma Jo smoking." T.J. nods, "Yes" – looking a bit meaner now. "I made an appointment to get nicotine patches so I can quit smoking."

I asked, "Do you know what a nicotine patch is?" He said, "Of course I do. It's a patch like a Band-Aid you change every day and it has nicotine on it and every day the patch has less nicotine until there isn't any nicotine on it anymore. And your addiction is gone." "Yes T.J. that is what I think a nicotine patch is. You are right!"

I *expected* him to give me his usual big bear cub hug and say, "Thanks Granma Jo!" But he just sat there looking at me, waiting, expecting more from me. What is he waiting for? What am I supposed to say, what does he want? What am I missing here? Humm, is my ego getting in the way? I don't understand.

Then he said, *"Well, are you gonna thank me now Granma?"*

I said, *"Yes T.J. Thank You. Not smoking will be a Good Life."*

Sometimes it takes Grandsons to open a Grandmothers Eyes!"

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