

A TREASURE HUNT

BY CAROLEE KOLVE

In the hopes of inducing our grandkids to spend the night, I ordered pillows with their names embroidered in large, colorful letters. They could stay up late! I would make chocolate chip pancakes for breakfast! But somehow, they found the prospect highly, and continuously, resistible.

Michael, 9, and Lily, 6, have refrained from staying over because they would rather sleep at home with their dogs. Henry, 6, and Holland, 4, stayed over once, last year, and seemed to enjoy themselves until bedtime. Then they convulsed into sobs. They missed their mom, their dad, their dog and their own beds. Eventually, they both ended up in bed with us, whining about the terrible noise they claim I make while sleeping.

One year later, I was getting a grandparent inferiority complex. My friend Julie has her grandkids flying all over the country to see her! My grandkids have taken countless trips with us and their parents. They come all the time for games, dinner, play time. Why did they not want to stay overnight?

Finally, after coaxing from their parents, they agreed to try it again, and Jerry and I were determined to make it the best night of their young lives. My friend Peggy (who, like me, is known to her grandkids as “Mimi”) coached me on the perfect “Mimi sleepover.” She said it was essential that we “plan copious activities, spoil them rotten, go heavy on the sweets and make them swear not to tell their parents about the junk food they got before dinner.”

When they arrived, Holland announced that this would be the best sleepover ever! Henry was less effusive, but said he was looking forward to all the games I had planned. In a fit of insecurity, I feared I hadn’t planned enough.

We began the first: a treasure hunt. This involved reading skills and teamwork. They had to read a clue, then find the next clue, etc. There were 12 clues spread all over the house, up and down stairs, leading eventually to the treasure. I thought it might take them a half hour, but it took all of 14 minutes.

Unfortunately, I forgot to buy the prizes, so the treasure was a cookie for each. Channeling Peggy, I told them they could have it before dinner, but they had to promise not to tell their parents.

What’s next, they asked? A scavenger hunt! There were 20 items on the list, challenging their powers of observation



Jonathan Williams/The Astorian

A grandmother writes of the time she got her grandkids to stay the night at her house.

and memory: i.e., find a bowl with painted grapes. This will be difficult, I promised. They got to use my phone to take a picture of everything they found. Alas, this took all of 18 minutes, and they were a tad disappointed that the prize was another cookie.

What’s next, they asked? Maybe we could have some chips and watch a little football, I suggested? My favorite team is playing Papa’s favorite team, Oregon! Okay, they said agreeably, and both decided to root for Oregon because they “live there.” As things unfolded, they and Papa had many more chances to cheer than I.

Sulking just a bit, I went to cook dinner: Cheeseburgers, their favorite! And corn, which Henry loves, and cantaloupe, which Holly loves. Unfortunately, I didn’t have the right kind of cheese, so we had to scrape it off. For dessert: ice cream and more cookies.

Then we watched the movie, “Minions,” which Henry narrated as we watched. “Don’t worry, Mimi, he’s not really dead.”

After that, we all decided it was bedtime. They got in their jammies, brushed their teeth and told me they wanted to sleep together in “Henry’s room.” We read a story. The night light was on; they had their special blankies. Things seemed so promising! I kissed them goodnight and made my quiet exit. Had it been too easy?

Henry: “Mimi, I need water!”

Holland: “I need water too!”

Henry: “Mimi, there is a terrible noise outside the window. I think there might be bad guys breaking into the house.” (Papa was opening the garage door.)

Holland: “Mimi, I need a baggie in case my loose tooth falls out.”

Henry: “Mimi, the covers are too tight.”

Holland: “Mimi, my pillow is too scratchy.” (Her embroidered name.)

Henry: “So is mine!”

Loosened covers, new pillows, kisses, good night! Finally, they went to sleep. Briefly.

Around midnight, Henry burst into our room, crying. “My tummy hurts, Mimi.

I think you gave me too many sweets. I really miss my mom and dad. I need to go home.”

“Well, Henry, I could call your mom and dad to come get you, but then you’d miss the morning treasure hunt.”

“Oh gosh, really? Another one? Well, I don’t want to miss that. But I hope the treasure isn’t more cookies, Mimi. Maybe we could find some money instead?”

With that he trotted back to bed and I went to the computer to compose a very long morning treasure hunt. And then to Jerry’s wallet to find the treasure.

Just as the sun rose, they burst happily into our room, asking for the first clue.

Half-asleep but smiling, Jerry and I high-fived.

Being so young, of course they do not yet “get” the grandparent world view.

There was only one treasure in our house. Them.

This essay was produced through a class taught by Tom Hallman Jr., a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter at The Oregonian.