

Hurdles to Raising Your Child's Child

Grandparents fight costly legal system

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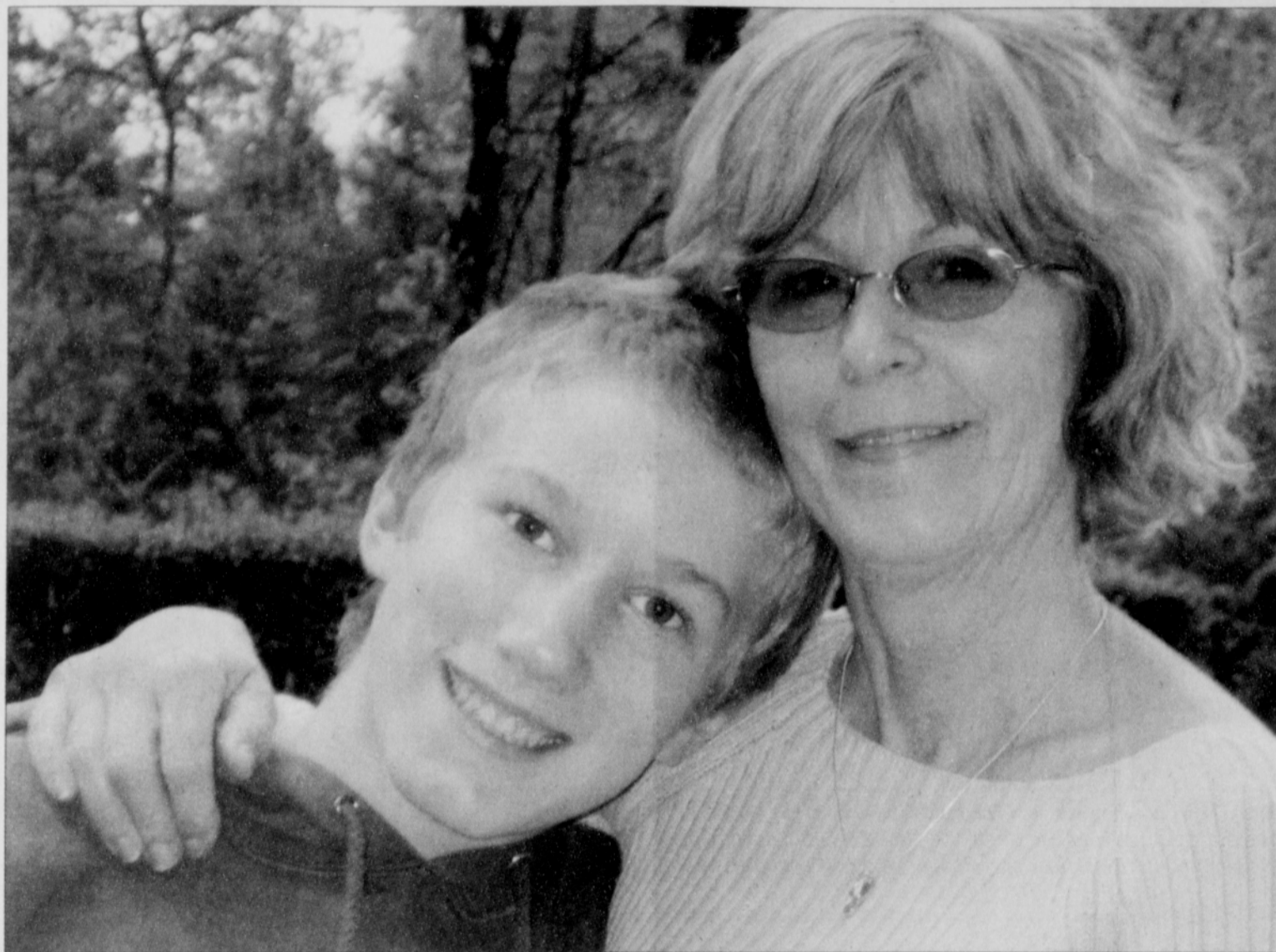
Her daughter became a young mother hooked on drugs, searching for the right man in all the wrong places. Now at the age of 58, Joan Callander finds herself as the sole provider of the 13-year-old grandson her daughter couldn't take care of. She's not the only one.

In Oregon, 22,103 grandparents are raising 4.4 percent of state's kids. Without intervention, children face neglect, abuse, abandonment and foster homes, not to mention drug use, gang activity and teen pregnancy.

Recently, grandparents rallied at the state capital to help raise public and legislative awareness of the issues they face.

"Several of the senators were very supportive in terms of working to see if they can't get some of the language in the Oregon laws changed simply to make it easier when a child is in a bad situation," Callander said. "You start out with baby steps and hopefully we'll move it forward a little next year."

Grandparents who are guardians for their child's offspring, often must go to court for re-



Joan Callander and her grandson Chad have done well together despite the hardships they've had to go through with Oregon laws.

straining orders, fight for parenting rights and give up an "ordinary" family life—all while attempting to prepare for retirement and living on Social Security.

"Right now it's pretty much that you have to prove that the

parents are unfit, which I think is necessary, but it's very difficult," Callander said.

She and other grandparents want to make it easier to qualify as "de facto" parents, gaining equal status with biological parents when the mother or father

has neglected, abused, abandoned or otherwise seriously endangered their child.

Right now, just the cost of an attorney fees stop many grandparents from taking action, she said.

Enrolling a child in school,

applying for Social Security benefits for children with disabilities or deceased parents, or authorizing emergency medical care also gets grandparents tangled up in legal regulations.

When Callander started raising her grandson more than 10

years ago, she felt that there wasn't much in the way of assistance or advice in working the system. So she wrote a book, "Second Time Around: Help for Grandparents Who Raise Their Children's Kids."

"I wrote it as a practical guide for people in crisis because sometimes you feel like you're the only one in the world that feels this way," she said.

Callander says grandparents can make calmer guardians, but also face the impacts of age.

"You don't necessarily try to mold your grandchild," she said. "As a grandparent, you step back and say 'I just want you to be happy and be a good, productive citizen.' It's hard to teach a kid to ride a bike when you're 50 years old, but you're more likely to sit with a child doing homework."

Beyond her own finances, Callander has to begin thinking about her grandson's future car insurance and college fund.

"Emotionally, it's a very hard place to be. I'm lucky that I was young enough when I started to still have energy and stamina," she said. "I do not know a single grandparent who would not give up the role of raising a grandchild, but when a parent is endangering their children by what they're doing with drugs and alcohol and violence — they don't have the right to do that."

For more information on this issue, visit www.aarp.org/or.

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Turn Off TV Event for Kids

The popular "Kill Your Television," bumper sticker may not be what the YMCA in Vancouver had in mind, but they are urging people to at least turn it off.

Too many hours watching TV or staring at a computer is contributing to an obesity epidemic, especially in children. In response, the Clark County Family YMCA, the 2005 Leadership Clark County Youth Project Team and Kaiser Permanente are challenging local residents to turn off their TV.

The YMCA at 11324 N.E. 51st Circle in Vancouver will open its doors to all Clark County residents for a free family night on Friday, April 29 from 6 to 9 p.m.

"We just want to get kids and families moving. Turning off the tube is a great first step towards a healthier tomorrow," said YMCA Senior Program Director Shawna Care.

The YMCA will offer diverse recreational activities such as taekwon do and rock climbing.

"We and other local sponsors of TV Turnoff Week encourage everyone to try a healthy physical activity instead of sitting at the computer or watching television," says Dr. Rasjad Lints, Kaiser Permanente's chief of pediatrics. "Each hour that a child watches TV increases his or her risk of becoming overweight. Children burn fewer calories, and many consume high-calorie foods while watching TV."

School Violence Hotline Working

(AP) — A new statewide 24-hour hot line and Web site for reporting school violence in Oregon is intended to head off incidences such as the recent school shooting in Minnesota.

Oregon is especially sensitive to school violence in the wake of Kip Kinkel's 1998 rampage through Thurston High School in Springfield which killed two students and injured 25 others.

Ribbon of Promise emphasizes the role students can play in preventing future deadly incidents because they are most likely to hear of a classmate's plans.

The new hot line and Web site are intended to help ease the reporting process. Students and parents are urged to call 866-305-7745, or file a report online at: www.oregonschoolsafety.com.