



Over THE River & Through THE Woods

COMEDY

PRODUCTION NUMBER 237

2022
SEASON

Jan. 07 — THROUGH — Feb. 12

Season Sponsored By
Your Utah Toyota dealers.



TOYOTA

Community
Sponsor:



When Tony Award winner Joe DiPietro opened his play *Over the River and Through the Woods* in 1998, his close relationship with his grandparents was not just for display onstage. His 86-year-old grandmother Ida DiPietro (seen in the play as Aida Gianelli) baked the anisette cookies for the opening-night party: “Joe loved everything homemade from scratch. I never bought no jar food. Of course, he never came often enough, but he enjoyed every minute of the day with us.”

Continued improvements in medical care and life expectancy means that more and more grandparents are experiencing longer and longer relationships with their grandchildren. While the power of strong relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren seem self-evident, new research is proving beyond a doubt what many already know: a close relationship benefits both sides.

New York Times writer Bruce Feiler comes to some powerful, research-based conclusions in his book *The Secrets of Happy Families* about the strength of grandparents and an intergenerational identity. He points out that child psychologists studying the aftereffects

of September 11 on children found that children who know their family’s stories and history are more resilient and better able to handle stress. Knowing the stories of their grandparents’ struggles puts their current challenges in perspective, and provides an example of people they know and love coming through difficult situations.

A recent Oxford University research study corroborated the tremendous impact grandparents can have when they are a regular part of their grandchildren’s lives: Dr. Eirini Flouri wrote that “We found that close relationships between grandparents and grandchildren buffered the effects of adverse life events, such as parental separation, because it calmed the children down.”

A 2016 study published in *The Gerontologist* dug further into the grandparent-grandchild relationship, finding that emotional closeness and shared interests between the two relieved symptoms of depression for both. It also found that mutual support (or “functional exchange”) between the generations did the same: if the two could help each other—be it through care, financial support, or an exchange of advice and information—depression symptoms lifted.

Almost 80 percent of grandparents surveyed in a Humana study reported that their adult grandchildren motivate them to stay physically healthy, and nearly 90% reported to AARP that their relationship with their grandchildren is good for their mental well-being.

As in *Over the River and Through the Woods*, these relationships can continue into adulthood and sometimes over great distance. A 2018 AARP study found half of grandparents have at least one grandchild who lives more than 200 miles away, and about a third live more than 50 miles from their closest grandchild.

In the 24 years since DiPietro wrote *Over the River and Through the Woods*, new technologies have meant that distance can be bridged more easily with grandparents increasingly using technology like Facebook and texting to keep in touch. Over 40% of grandparents considered themselves “tech savvy” with 67% saying they enjoy online video chats with grandkids, and over 40% reporting enjoying social media as a way to keep up.

In a *New York Times* interview, playwright DiPietro’s 86-year-old anisette-cookie-baking grandmother summed up their relationship: “I wanted him to stay in New Jersey, and we felt very bad when he moved to New York. But he said: ‘It’s not so far. Don’t worry.’ I know I’m the worrier type, but as long as I hear from him, I won’t worry. He knows what he’s doing. But listen, this is still an attached family. And on that stage, that’s my dining room. It’s identical.”

—HCTO Guest Dramaturg Mark Fossen, MFA