

Dear Judith,

Life just got kicked up a notch around here. We are now on *Grandma Alert* status. Just when I thought that life had doled out all its surprises and retirement was shaping up to be that often-promised *Golden Years* relaxation period, our daughter has announced that she is expecting a baby later this year.

I must confess that we thought she would be a career lady all her life. But the alarm must have gone off on that biological clock and she and her husband dropped the bombshell on unsuspecting us. Certainly, others have gone through this many times but for us (me) it's a bit strange, primarily because of the changes I see in my wife.

Obviously, I am pleased that I will be a grandfather. But news of an impending birth seems to have an effect out of all proportion on grandmas-to-be. Grandchildren, I now understand, are the hot topic of conversation at quilting evenings and during afternoon knitting sessions. I suppose that if you haven't got one (or more), you must feel a bit left out. So now my wife looks forward to taking her place among the photograph-sharing, story-telling, doting ladies of her acquaintance.

Now, if that were the extent of it, I could be understanding and supportive. However, I have noticed more subtle changes in the lady who lives with me. I find myself, by osmosis, getting a refresher course on pregnancy and the latest trends in childbirth techniques. Since I did not pay much attention the first time round, I find it disconcerting now. Besides, I really don't want to know the details.

More directly, however, I note that our shopping patterns have changed subtly. No longer do we go to the mall and amble around aimlessly. Now it's straight to the maternity shops or the baby stores. Who knew that there were so many children's consignment stores? We've scouted them all from the wilds of Westboro to the depths of the Glebe. More than once I have been left in a store to loiter in lingerie while Dear Lady ricochets off on a tangent to the adjoining baby and children's department.

Garage sales have become a magnet. A few months ago, Saturday mornings in the car elicited, "Nothing there except kids' stuff. Keep going." Now all I hear on Saturday is, "Let's go to such-and-such a place today. There may be some baby things we can pick up." Silly me, I thought it was the parents' place to buy things for a baby.

It seems I have just as much to learn about grandparenting as my son-in-law has to learn about being a father. He is still in shock after a recent weekend visit that saw him going home with a car stuffed with a rocking horse, assorted toys, "essential" baby bits and pieces and clothes, the result of a major garage sale expedition led by Expectant Grandma and expecting wife. For my part, I just chuckled at his discomfort in trying to load the car for the trip home, recalling similar experiences in years gone by travelling with kids, pets and all the accoutrements that went with them.

But, back on the home front, all those charity baby quilts my wife made over the years now prove their worth. I did not realize that they were mere practice runs for The Quilt for our own grandchild. Dusty old boxes in the basement and the top shelves of closets suddenly opened to reveal baby garments of thirty or more years ago. They are a legacy of a time gone by when all the ladies in a family knitted little booties and caps and coats for newborns. And I noticed that some toys, secretly squirreled away in a box or two under the stairs, look a bit dated. I wonder if the kid will notice?

Have to go now and pack. We have to drive for six hours and spend a long weekend with my daughter. It's a periodic ultrasound, you see, and the family is allowed to get a glimpse of the results. This child is not even born yet and already the life of this Doddering Old Man is turning upside down!

Yours,

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