



The Certificate

Certificates accompany us throughout our lives. At the end of each stage, we are given a certificate, from a birth certificate to a death certificate.

Thus I have accumulated over the years a series of certificates. The "little guy" (that's me) graduated Kindergarten with honors, twelve school grades, several army courses, and The Technion (an Israeli university). Some certificates are framed and hang on the bathroom wall or in the office, while others are encrypted in hidden files that will only be found after my death.

About a year after first becoming grandparents, we were called in for an interview with the little tyke's parents. As befitting interrogation rooms, we sat upright in stiff wooden chairs as a harsh glare from the window blinded us. "This is in regards to a toddler who is about to begin nursery school", my son said. "We are examining whether you are worthy of picking him up once a week in the afternoon from nursery school and caring for him for a few hours until we, his parents, return from work."

Questions flowed, answers less. After a long investigation, the judges withdrew to deliberate. Upon return they stated that the division of labor would be as follows: Grandmother, known as a responsible woman, will be charged with the important matters: arriving on time for the end-of-day pick-up, making sure the tyke is wearing a coat zipped up to the neck and a warm woolen hat, providing a bottle of freshly squeezed orange juice, changing diapers, delivering a steady supply of healthy food, and of course - the supervision of Grandfather. In short, Grandma is in charge of overall health.

I, on the other hand, whose responsible nature is

questionable, will be charged with pushing the stroller, walking with the tyke hand in hand, pushing the swing and turning the carousel, reading books, and making funny faces. In short, Grandpa is in charge of cultural enrichment.

At the end of the conversation my daughter-in-law took out of a drawer what looked like a parchment scroll and handed it to me. The certificate read: "Grandfather is hereby certified to take grandchild out of nursery school." This was the first time I had received a certificate before completing the course!

For months, we both traveled by train once a week to the big city, where my son lived. Five minutes before the appointed dismissal hour, we arrived at the nursery school gate - waiting for the doors to open and all the tykes to come out.

While lightly rubbing his eyes after a long nap and looking a bit confused and curious, authority over the toddler was passed on to us by his teacher. We each played our part. I was responsible for minor activities and excluded from truly important ones.

A few weeks ago, grandmother became ill and so I had to travel alone. I arrived half an hour early and decided to sip on a cup of steaming hot vegetable soup at a nearby café to pass the time. At the appointed hour, I waited at the nursery school. The toddler came out. He smiled at me shyly and hurried to get a slice of dried fruitcake, distributed by his teacher at the end of each day. Hand in hand we walked towards the nearest park, when a dull pain began radiating upwards from the bottom of my stomach.

The toddler, already chatting with a few words but also using hand gestures, explained what

he wanted. "There", he said, pointing to the swing, carousel, and slide. I ran after him feeling the abdominal pain growing worse. It must have been the bowl of soup, I thought; I'd better stay close to a bathroom.

In a quick and responsible move, I grabbed the toddler and placed him in the stroller. Grandpa doesn't feel well, I said. Let's hurry home so you can play and I can rest. If the Olympics had a grandpa-grandson doubles stroller racing competition we would have surely received a medal. Bent over from stomach pains, I hurried down the sidewalk, deliriously making wrong turns, and eventually arriving home exhausted. I lay down on the couch, took a deep breath to alleviate the nausea emanating from my stomach, and thought to myself: we are saved! Here nothing can go wrong.

Lying on the couch, eyes closed, hands resting on my forehead, I muttered: Grandpa doesn't feel well. Play alone for a little while.

For a moment the room was silent. Then I heard him say to me clear as day, as if he had just graduated with honors from the Department of Hebrew Language: "Grandpa, poo".

The silence became so thick I could slice it with a knife. I glanced at the wall clock to estimate how much time remained until someone responsible would come to replace me and his diaper. I decided that the sentence I had heard was a fragment of my imagination, and I should ignore it. Suddenly I heard him call right into my ear - again speaking loud and clear: "Grandpa, change my diaper."

It was the moment of truth. To be or not to be, the ultimate test. Was I worthy of the certificate I received or would I fail at the task at hand? I

dragged myself off the sofa, held his hand, and together we walked to the changing table. I was bent over in pain, while he was laughing wildly, sure that Grandpa was walking crookedly just to make him giggle.

Dazed from stomach pains, I attempted to take off the diaper. My pain spasms amused the pipsqueak. I release the right sticker on the diaper and he sticks it right back. I fling the diaper on the floor and he pulls the blanket over his face. I reached for wipes and cleaned until there was no trace left.

I attempted to put a new diaper on him. I wrap his bottom and he, to make things more difficult, rolls onto his side. I attach the sticker and he releases it. I completed the diapering process and moved on to the pants. I will refrain from further descriptions. At the end of the process stood a toddler on the floor, wearing pants and a grin. At that moment the door opened. My daughter-in-law entered the apartment after a long day at work and asked: "How was it?"

"Everything is perfect," I answered. I have earned my certificate!

THE END.

