



## “EVERY DAY AT HALF PAST THREE . . . *Me and Zayde.* Time for tea.”

**SO BEGINS THE DELIGHTFUL PJ LIBRARY BOOK, TEA WITH ZAYDE**, by Barney Saltzberg.

With catchy rhymes and whimsical illustrations, *Tea with Zayde* tells the tale of a very special tea party ritual between a grandfather and his granddaughter. Their relationship is like any other tea party between a grandparent and young child, full of giggles and fun, but as they say their goodbyes, we learn that the tea party takes place across computer screens. Our little narrator and her grandfather don't get to share actual hugs each day, but the love and bond between them is unmistakably tangible.

Like the characters in *Tea with Zayde*, my children have grown up living at a physical distance from their grandparents. My kids couldn't visit their grandparents on any given afternoon when they came home from school, as their cousins could, and my parents couldn't be present at every school event or milestone. When my children were little, we would make the drive every few weeks for a quick weekend or hectic holiday visit.

A few years ago, my parents moved in with us while my mother recovered from surgery. For the first time in my teenage kids' lives, they were able to spend unhurried, sustained time with grandparents. We shared conversation at the dinner table each night, and were able to just hang out on the couch together and chat as Zayde did his crossword puzzle and Bubbe rested.

Each of us learned something new about our family. I distinctly recall the moment when my father mentioned an experience he'd had when in the army, and my son lit up in surprise and said, “you're a Korean War veteran, Zayde? Wow! I never knew that!” My father shared other stories about his military service and also about his childhood dog and about life in Brooklyn in the 30's and 40's. I had heard my dad talk about playing stickball and the neighborhood penny candy store, but during those weeks I heard him tell stories even I'd never heard before. My parents had the chance to enjoy their grandchildren, see their sibling dynamic, and get a sense of their daily lives. Living together under one roof for those few weeks brought us together in a way that only time makes possible.

Like many other families, we don't spend as much time together as we would like, so we rely on technology to keep in touch. My kids' real-life Zayde has not taken to videoconferencing, like our *Tea with Zayde* character, but each of our parents has their way. My mom prefers the phone. My dad likes to email cartoons or articles of interest. My in-laws often call or send voicemail texts to the grandchildren when they are in the car or waiting to board a flight.

Sometimes things go awry, like when my dad mistakenly used “LOL” in an email to a grandchild who had just received a college rejection, or when Siri sends indecipherable transcriptions of Grampa's voice messages. Yet even when the shorthand is off or the words are garbled, the message to my children is clear: your grandparents love you. Technology cannot replace a real hug or unhurried time together, but, as we see in our *Tea with Zayde* tale, it can be a wonderful second best.

  
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President