"How is distance grandparenting for you?"
A study of long haul, New Zealand distance
grandparents and inter-generational
transnational familying.

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Abstract

This thesis is the first academic study of New Zealand distance grandparents by a New Zealander. It is based on eight, in-depth qualitative, ethnographic interviews with distant grandparents whose global families live 20 – 30 hours flight travel away. I ask the question: "How is distance grandparenting for you?" My findings complement, to a large degree, the existing handful of similar global studies of this prolific but little researched contemporary kinship phenomenon. The participants' responses and my analysis contribute to this literature by focusing on communication, the ambiguity of relationships, emotions, 'being there' and the practical realities, now and into the future.

I bring to this discussion three factors which combined promise a unique contribution. First, I have known my participants for an average of 14 years. This infuses, on occasions, a deeper discerning to the participants' responses that goes beyond our 1½ hour formal interviews and assists to paint a more longitudinal picture of each family 'package'. Second, I am a 20+ year veteran of transnational familying with most, not just some, of my family living permanently far overseas. This affords me the opportunity, via autoethnographic methods, to weave an additional insider richness by way of personal reflections, encounters and storytelling. Finally, during the lead up and delivery of this project I lived through some of the most challenging times of my own transnational kinship journey. Rather than keep these family trials and tribulations private, I have shared them, exposing my vulnerability and a rawness of emotion that takes the reader to a place and understanding of transnational, intergenerational familying they may not have otherwise got to (Ruth Behar 1996:14).

My argument is straightforward: how distance grandparenting is for my participants is the product of several interacting factors: their personal situation, their distance family and in-country family relationships, geographical boundaries and time zone restrictions along with cultural, religious and language issues. Furthermore, for my distance grandparents 'Place' is multi-sited: physically and psychologically. Distance grandparenting is ever changing, evolving and on occasions can be a lonely place. In general, my New Zealand distance grandparents 'make the most' of their situations accepting the good with the bad, the 'pros and the cons', and maintain an upbeat stance.

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Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION

Grandparenting is rich in tradition, personal historical experiences, emotions and expectations. An individual's view of a grandparenting role is infused with previous kin relationships, observations of friends and family, stereotypical images, and heartfelt desires (Mansson 2016, Thiele & Whelan 2006). In Cherlin and Furstenburg's 1986 classic study of American grandparenthood they stated that the three most crucial factors influencing the frequency of grandparent-grandchild contact are "distance, distance, and distance" (cited in Nesteruk & Marks 2009:92). This is profound.

At any moment, twenty per cent of people born in New Zealand live overseas (Inkson & Thorn 2011). In a New Zealand Families Commission Report discussing the changing role of grandparents, it was noted that 23 per cent of the grandparents interviewed had grandchildren living overseas (Kerslake Hendricks 2010:49). Left behind, more and more often, are parents and frequently grandparents, without the opportunity to be 'day to day', 'hands-on' Nanas and Grandads. The title of Cati Coe's *The Scattered Family* aptly describes Ghanaians' global transnational kinship separations (2014). This thesis does the same for a handful of scattered New Zealand European Pākehā families.

This thesis explores and surveys the intersectional dialogue of experiences, aspirations, attitudes, performance and concerns of a sample of New Zealand distance grandparents, who have grandchildren living more or less permanently overseas, in 'long haul'[1] Western destinations. I selected this criterion as a weekend visit is generally not viable to a long haul travel destination, thus adding another physical and psychological boundary to the ability to grandparent in-person.

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[1] 'Long haul' is an airline industry term and has various interpretations in different commercial travel markets. Short-haul travel destinations, from a New Zealand perspective, are considered three-hour flights to east coast Australia (Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide) and most Pacific Islands. A weekend visit, from a New Zealand perspective, is considered viable to these destinations. Long-haul destinations represent the rest of the globe, thus requiring an eight to thirty-hour journey.

This thesis offers a critical, reflexive and comparative contribution to anthropological kinship debates by arguing that contemporary transnational families function in ways that are changing the face of what it means to be 'grandparents'. Research has found that theirs is a situation that logistically and geographically restricts, to varying degrees, the potential richness of their grandparenting experiences. Communication routines are important and issues regarding the emotions connected with absence/presence, relationships, 'being there' along with practical considerations emerged from my data.

My qualitative research is based mainly on in-depth interviews juxtaposed with my own autoethnographic experiences. Eight case studies will be discussed and are supplemented with reflections and findings from my own distance grandparenting experiences. Each of my participants (myself included) is a small cog in a rapidly changing world. How distance grandparenting is from their perspective, in their part of the world, in their exclusive time zone, when some of their closest loved ones live 15 – 30 flight hours away, is a story that needs to be told. As Holly Sevier states: "…this research seeks to give a voice to the grandparents themselves" (2013:140).

Contemporary kinship

> The resilience of kinship in globalization-affected societies and the question whether humanity is gaining or losing in the globalization process calls for further investigation.
> (Brumann 1998:495)

Over time, the boundaries of relationships that knit people together in bonds of kinship have shifted. (Bullard 2019:2) The primary task of anthropology is to "understand other people's understandings" (Ingold & Lucas 2007:287). Anthropologists have traditionally been the leading theoreticians of kinship (Carsten 2000:2, 2004:7; Holy 1996:1) and regard kinship as the key to understanding the "functioning and evolution of human culture" (Wilson 2016:571). Kinship studies which were once at the heart of anthropology, and to a degree still are, explain the social relationships and bonds between family members and other social structures.

Intrinsic to early studies of kinship was biology: procreation, blood connections and social structure, all of which informed who was related to whom, and how societies functioned.

Since the 1970s the nature of kinship in the West has, according to Janet Carsten (2004), taken on "many new guises" and includes advanced reproductive technologies, changing kinds of sexuality, genders and family. Subsequently people are able to determine who is kin and who is not and what kinds of kinship are important, and what kinds are not (Carsten 2004:180). The norms of kinship are in a state of constant evolution and flux. Bio-essentialism still has a defining role but encapsulates only part of the framework when analysing the "flexible choreography" of contemporary kinship (Thompson cited in Carsten 2004:188). Carsten questions to what extent kinship is the natural order of things and the degree to which it is shaped by human engagement (2004:6). Globalisation is another new "guise" and has undoubtedly been shaped by human engagement. It is this that is central to why the kinship model of distance grandparenting is now so prevalent. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen explains, the world is "shrinking", and that affects how families 'family' (2010:197).

Another new influential phenomenon is information and communications technology which has begun to challenge the premise that strong kinship relationships require face-to-face interaction (Baldassar et al. 2016:133). In Chapters 5 and 6 I will discuss the distance grandparent 'place' of cyberspace. No kin live there, but distance families, from time to time simultaneously occupy its space.

As more people move territories and countries, inevitably some are left behind. Thus enters an emptying anthropological field site called 'home' and those who remain: the reshaping of kin, without kin on hand. This thesis provides insight into what a handful of New Zealand, left-behind grandparents can tell us about their version of contemporary, globalised kinship.

Researching distance grandparents and my argument

Distance grandparenting is relevant to, and draw from, a wide range of topics and themes including transnationalism, human geography, mobility, globalisation,

migration, tourism, gerontology, communication, kinship, identity, senses, emotions and gender. The thread that pulls these all together and gives them coherence is the way contemporary families 'family' and adjust in our global world. This thesis contributes to research on the understandings by distant grandparents of transnational kinship ties, adjustments of roles and intergenerational relations.

Trisia Farrelly, Rochelle Stewart-Withers and Kelly Dombrowski (2014), in a study of the absence of researchers' children in their research fields, concluded that limiting themselves to a consideration of their children's physical absence, in and of itself, rendered insufficient analysis to the agency of their children's' absence; there were other considerations. These included how and by whom the children were cared for in their absence. The reactions by locals to the geographical and psychological context of the researchers' children's absence/presences also influenced the researchers (2014:2&7). Similarly, Olena Nesteruk and Loren Marks, in a study of Eastern European/U.S.A. transnational families, initially focused on the distance factor and found there were other considerations around linguistic and cultural dimensions that needed to be allowed for in their argument (2009:92). These scholars support my analysis process, which travelled a similar path. This thesis provides evidence that how distance grandparenting is, for any given grandparent, cannot be isolated and defined in a tidy, separate part of their being. I write of family 'packages': who makes up their family? My research has shown that how distance grandparenting is for long haul, Kiwi[2] distance grandparents is a constantly changing blend of communication routines, emotions, relationships, 'being there' and practical issues fused around their current personal situation, in-country family 'package', distance family 'package', geographical boundaries, restrictions and cultural, religious and/or language issues.

When referencing their current situation, I am referring to the participants' ages, health, employment status, marital status, financial situation, ability or desire to travel, and so forth. Scattered through the chapters, participants offer evidence of

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[2] A kiwi is a flightless New Zealand bird. New Zealanders are informally known as kiwis.

their current situation along with their thoughts and reflections of how these can change.

Both the grandparents' distance, and in-country family 'packages' and relationships matter. Questions need to be asked around the number and ages of participants' children (middle generation) and grandchildren, locations, routines of contact, obligations of caring in either direction and the quality of relationships. These areas can, on occasions, be littered with emotions and senses-filled experiences and create ambivalence and ambiguity. Geographical boundaries are what ostensibly create the 'distance' of distance grandparenting, however, talk of time zones and other communication restrictions weave themselves through the thesis creating other kinds of "distance". There is no escaping from these barriers, which are understood by my participants on an intellectual level, but also felt at a very human and emotional level. Cultural, religious and/or language issues are also important topics for gaining a full picture of distance grandparenting. While these issues were not predominant for my participants, they were crucial for other researchers and need to be acknowledged as part of the framework as to how distance grandparenting works in a global context. When arguing how distance grandparenting is for distance grandparents none of these findings can be omitted. It is together that a clear picture can be constructed, and the research question more fully answered. In tandem with the argument are eight recurring themes. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 and evidence is also scattered through the thesis.

What does all this mean? Unstable spaces are often addressed by anthropology, and distance grandparenting is no exception. I argue that this contemporary kinship model is complicated, unsettling and challenging, while simultaneously being adventuresome and occasionally taxing. It is neither clear cut nor fixed and exposes new, uncharted anthropological territory. Therefore, how distance grandparenting is, at any given moment, for each distance grandparent is complex, unpredictable and uneven terrain.

My background

When reviewing other master's theses, I found significant variation in the degree of detail regarding each of the authors' personal 'back stories', and affinity and relationship with their research topic. My connection has been a grandparenting journey which is now heading into its 21st year and which needs to be addressed so the reader can appreciate the intersecting of my world, of myself as an academic researcher, and of how my life experiences have impacted and affected my thinking, ideas and inspiration for tackling this project.

Figure 1: Wedding of Clive & Helen Ellis, 1989

My husband and I are New Zealanders and New Zealand has always been our home. My thirty-year-old, second marriage resulted in a blended family. We each brought to our union a son and daughter. My husband is older than me, and in the year of our wedding our children turned 21, 20, 5 and 3 years. We had no children together. There was little one could describe as conventional about our familial package at that time. These days our children are in their 50s and 30s. Throughout the years since our children have been on the move, one or other has lived for either months, years or permanently in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Sweden, U.S.A., Thailand, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, South Sudan and Pakistan. We told our children "they could do anything" and that is exactly what they did.

In 1999, my London based stepson (Son No 1) and his English wife produced their first child, a daughter. She was the first grandchild for my husband's side of the family, and we popped a bottle of champagne in Auckland. It was a strange sort of celebration. I can recall standing in our garden, the sky was clear blue on a July winter's day and thinking "this all feels odd". I was only 40 years old with two teenagers at home. I did not realise it at the time, but our world was launching along a path some distance from the "normal" script. The internet was not a part of our world, and we relied on costly telephone calls, letters and photos sent in the mail to keep in touch.

Shortly after, Daughter No 1, and her Scottish husband produced a baby girl in Edinburgh, soon to be followed by their permanent move back to New Zealand and the arrival of our only Kiwi-born granddaughter, a couple of years later. Around the same time, the English based family delivered our first grandson. We now had two grandchildren in England and two in New Zealand. For the next fifteen years, we made numerous visits to the United Kingdom (U.K.). Our U.K. grandchildren have yet to visit New Zealand.

Many years later, my own daughter (Daughter No 2) married an American of Irish heritage and produced my first 'blood' grandson in Bangkok. They visited New Zealand twice with the little one, and we travelled there several times. Their second son arrived just after they moved to Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A., and we have visited the States a few times. Just to add to the international milieu my son (Son No 2) 'won' a U.S. Green Card in their lottery scheme and has resided in Chicago for a few years and during the writing of this thesis proposed to his American girlfriend. Recently my Scottish born step-granddaughter left New Zealand shores on a working holiday to the city of her birth. So, at the time of writing, three of our four children and five of our six grandchildren (aged 3 – 20 years) live a significant distance from New Zealand. My husband and I have quietly accepted all these comings and goings, and to date, I can recall eighteen long haul visitation trips since the first one left home. Once my daughter produced grandchildren our roles as distance grandparents truly started to become part of our identity. Conversations with friends frequently commenced with questions around where were we heading to next?

It felt that there was a story to tell, questions that needed to be asked and voices to be heard. I could relate to Dawne Sanson, who wrote of her heuristic interest in her research topic. She cites Patton, who defines heuristic as "a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher" (2012:53-54). Furthermore, Sanson explains that others involved in the study need to have the same level of interest. This was fortunately the case, thanks to my ever-patient, travel companion husband. The time had come to formalise my exploration of distance grandparenting.

A disclaimer

> The idealized grandmother of today is a benign, white-haired, kindly old woman who bakes cookies; hugs little children; holds them on her lap; kisses away their "boo-boos"; knits blankets, sweaters, and booties; and never speaks an unkind word. She is helpful to her off-spring and baby-sits whenever she is needed. She is available at all times but makes herself invisible when her presence is inconvenient. She dotes on her grandchildren, hangs onto their every utterance, and is certain that they will grow up to be Einstein – or at least a doctor. She attends all of their functions and beams with pride, regardless of the quality of their performance.
>
> (Falk & Falk 2002:65)

Ursula Adler Falk and Gerhard Falk's amusing comments help us paint a picture of the idealised grandmother. Although a little fanciful, this definition serves a purpose because 'perfect' familial images affect expectations and ideas of what the role could or should be like. Laura Stafford describes the grandparent role as "diverse, dynamic and complex" (2005:72); two contrasting, while still complementary comments suggesting the role is not necessarily straightforward or even obvious. At this point, I believe a disclaimer is in order. As the reader begins to inevitably form a picture of me as a grandmother, accompanied by the knowledge that I have recently devoted a good portion of time to writing and researching grandparenthood, it might be natural to assume I am a 100 per cent doting, committed grandmother and love every aspect of this familial role. The honest answer is "no". I am by no means a disinterested

grandparent, but I am nothing like Ursula Adler Falk and Gerhard Falk's humorous definition. I love my grandchildren, treasure being with them and savour all the memories we create, but too much of a good (or occasionally not so good) thing will, in time, have me yearning for the return of the grandchild-free parts of my world.

Thesis structure

I will now provide an outline and justification for the chapters that follow: a 'road map' to the thesis. The next chapter furnishes a literature review of the existing, limited distance grandparenting scholarship. This will highlight the differing approaches that scholars have embraced in order to research this multi-sited topic. Following on, is the *Methodology* chapter which is divided into three parts covering qualitative research, myself as a researcher and the interview process. Chapter 4 discusses thematic findings that weave themselves throughout the thesis, and their early introduction provides a useful framework of reference. Chapter 5 is devoted to communication routines; a key ingredient of distance grandparenting. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 form a trilogy dealing with emotions, relationships and 'being there'. They include findings around absence/presence, the senses, loss, acceptance, ambiguity, ambivalence, gatekeepers versus gate openers and crises. The final chapter covers topics my participants raised and include travel, global fitness, financial and health issues and future concerns. I touch on physical kinlessness and my participants reminisce. Before the chapter is finished, I address the lesser talked about benefits of distance grandparenting. Direct participant quotations feature heavily in the thesis, forming a backbone in the data chapters. In some respects I have covered a little bit of a lot. All the topics were raised by my participants and the breadth of the discussion offers evidence that my research question to my participants was broad and distance grandparenting is more complex than it might first appear.

Chapter 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing grandparent scholarship, explaining the complexities and theory of the role, provides a foundation to the basics of grandparenthood; and the basics matter. In this literature review I will highlight the ways in which distance grandparent is and has been researched from different perspectives, thus providing a context with which to insert my own data and findings. It seems fit that Margaret Mead, one of anthropology's most famous early scholars, has some input here. She once said of her own distance grandparenthood: "[...] the idea that as a grandparent one was dealing with action at a distance – that somewhere, miles away, a series of events occurred that changed one's status forever – I had not thought of that and I found it very odd" (1972:275). Likewise, Laura Sigad and Rivaka Eisikovits cite Clark et. al who claimed lives of all generations of a family are forever changed when kin decide to migrate (2013:308).

When I first examined this topic I searched for studies which, like mine, sought to understand the experiences of distance grandparents. I was taken aback by the minimal results. Scholars repeatedly state that 'left behind' grandparents remain insufficiently studied (Charenkova & Gevorgianiene 2018; Dunifon 2013:56; Gray et al. 2005:10; Holladay & Seipke 2007:295; Kelly 2015:31; Sevier 2013:140; Sigad & Eisikovits 2013:309; Stafford 2005:73; Venter & van Wyk 2018). Distance grandparenting, especially from the grandparent's perspective, hovers under the radar in both academic and mainstream literature (Bangerter & Waldron 2014:89). My work seeks to contribute to filling this scholarly void.

Distance grandparenting is not a new phenomenon; families have separated geographically for centuries. What is new, from even a decade or so ago, is the availability of social media, the ease of video technology and affordable travel, and the growth of globalisation which have all revolutionised distance grandparenting (Ahlin 2017; Holladay & Seipke 2007). In fact, transnational kinship academic findings written before the common usage of this digital technology, especially around topics of globalisation and communication, often lacks relevance and I discuss this further in

Chapter 5. Contemporary publications have therefore dominated my reading and research.

My review of the literature turned out different forms of transnational kinship research. First, like my own, are the 'one-sided' studies reporting the voices of their grandparent participants. Other projects are 'two-sided', multi-sited global projects involving a group of researchers and extensive travelling, acknowledging the voices of both the grandparents and their transnational family members. The following handful of distance grandparenting studies have been cornerstone comparisons with which to analyse my own data. All examples, except one, utilized the method of qualitative, in-home interviews in the same way that I intended to do, reassuring me about my methodological decision.

One-sided research

Hawaiian based grandparents of Indian heritage, and their distance families living in mainland North America, are the subjects of an article by Holly Sevier (2013). These grandparents arrived permanently on Hawaii's shores many years ago. Later, it was not unexpected when their university educated married children, many of whom were American born, decided to move to the mainland for reasons including career advancement. The grandparents, though considering themselves 'locals' (American and not Indian) still retain strong links to their Sikh community, customary foods and desire to preserve, through their family, the knowledge of the Hindi and Punjabi languages. The writer primarily addressed the perseverance and connectedness of navigating disparate ways of parenting in a growing multicultural intergenerational environment (2013:139). Key themes are the importance to the grandparents of language knowledge and retention by the grandchildren and the ritual significance of certain foods, the latter of which one grandmother described as the "glue that bound their families together" (Sevier 2013:146). The grandparents offered many views and some criticism about the ways in which their grandchildren were being brought up on the mainland. Modern parenting methods involving technology and a myriad of activities did not always sit easily with the grandparents who preferred, when visits occurred in either direction, to read, play puzzles and cook. Sevier concluded, through

the words of her participants, that distance grandparenting is hard, but worth the effort and a continuous recalibration of cultural expectations imposed upon the mainland family by the grandparents, makes for better relationships (2013:152-3). This work particularly connects to my research as Hawaii is an island territory like New Zealand and from the outset there is a sense of isolation.

Sigad and Eisikovit's (2013) research focused on twelve American-born widowed or married grandparents of European Jewish ethnic origin who reside permanently in metropolitan areas of the East Coast of the United States. The distance family were their American born married daughters and grandchildren, who live semi-permanently in northern Israel (frequently visiting the U.S.). In contrast to my research methodology the middle generation daughters with children, were recruited first, and they led to the grandparent participants who were interviewed in either their home in the U.S. or while they visited Israel. The sons-in-law did not feature in any discussions. The scholars wished to examine the experiences of grandparenting across borders and in particular the interaction between societal beliefs about grandparenting, and the grandparents' own experiences and how this affected grandparent/grandchild relationships (2013:308). The grandparents were disappointed by the physical and emotional distance, cultural gaps and concerns about their family's physical safety in Israel. The authors use the term "deep disappointment" to describe the grandparents' experience of transnationalism which the interviewees felt had altered their roles (2013:314). Despite all these concerns the grandparents adopted a stance of 'boxing on', looking for ways to become increasingly global fit and maintain some degree of normal family life. This research left me questioning if the American grandparents had any in-country family living nearby, in the same way my participants had, who may have off-set, in even a small way, the grandparents' disappointment about their distance grandparenting status and demands.

Lauren R. Bangerter and Vincent R. Waldron (2014) interviewed American grandparents living in Arizona with a view to examining changes in long-distance relationships between grandparents and their adolescent grandchildren. This is the only example of quantitative research in this survey and I have included this commentary as some findings complement my own research. The project addressed

the shift in the closeness of their grandparent/grandchild relationship (positive and negative) along with identifying significant turning-point events. A turning point is defined as a transformative event in which a relationship is changed in some way (Baxter & Erbert cited in Bangerter & Waldron 2014:89). Examples of these events were furnished to the participants and include a death in the family, marriage, moving out of state or the birth of a child. The authors defined distance as being far enough away that it was impossible to see their grandchild every day. This somewhat vague criterion of distance is worthy of discussion and I will comment further in Chapter 4. The grandparents were asked two questions around how relational closeness has changed for them and what types of events (positive or negative) have been relational turning points for them. The answers were graphed. The researchers' findings established 100 unique turning points and eight different categories of relational turning points, both positive and negative (2014:88). The authors discussed a plethora of findings around communication, time together, closeness and children gaining independence. Some grandparents experienced considerable change in relationships with their adolescent grandchildren while others enjoyed stability. Unlike Sigad and Eisikovits's (2013) reasonably consistent findings, Bangerter and Waldron's were the opposite (2014). This is perhaps because the earlier research featured a narrow, specific group of participants with many commonalities, likely to respond similarly, while the latter study involved a wide group of participants with fewer commonalities. The aspect of this research that piqued my interest was the instruction to the grandparents that they needed to pick one grandchild only even if they had other distance grandchildren. I wondered how they made that decision. My research indicates that sometimes distance grandparents have stronger/warmer relationships with one grandchild over another. At times during my interviews I sensed greater ease when a particular grandchild was the topic of conversation and I would gingerly use the term 'favourite grandchild'. If my distance grandparents had been told to 'pick just one' I wonder who they would pick, and why, and how would this affect the findings.

Scholarship also exists from the perspective of grandparents who chose to live in a location away from their family. Stephen Banks (2009) interviews U.S. and Canadian grandparent retirees residing in Mexico. Their families live in North America. He

wanted to research identity narratives of North Americans who had experienced two major life changes: retirement from full-time employment and relocation to a different country (2009:179). All interviewees lived in and around the same lakeside location, described as an "expatriate retirement colony" (2009:179). The researcher and expatriates jointly initiated the interview topics and story telling had a strong presence. The findings were mixed: both positive and negative. Some grandparents, despite the distance maintained warm relationships with their distant family while a few had less than favourable relationships and examples were provided of what I later refer to as the 'gatekeeper' scenario; troubled relationships with the middle generation parents. Banks highlights the uniqueness of each participant's set of personal circumstances, and how they navigate transnational familying. Additionally these were consistently juxtaposed with a repeating pattern of responses from his participants. First, they expressed their love for their grandchildren, followed by an "inevitable" *but* explanation justifying their current circumstances and finally a *so* comment, expressing an acceptance of the current situation (2009:187). For many their decision to reside in Mexico is not set in concrete; they keep the door open that they may return. The 'thinking space' of these participants differs to some degree from those of my participants as Bank's participants chose to live away from their family. However, this choice adds an interesting layer to the discussions of transnational kinship.

Two sides to every story

The second research approach involves interviewing both the 'in-country' family and their distance family. This is a lengthier process and involves extensive time, expense, travel, translators and all manner of logistical issues along with exceptional people skills to successfully navigate all these connections.

Tanja Ahlin's (2017) research was based in Kerala, India and focused on the supposed plight of 'left behind' elderly Indian parents (and grandparents). Many Indian adult children migrate overseas, and their parents are often left alone, needing assistance and coping, or otherwise, with declining health. These migrants are frequently nurses (female and male) and Ahlin interviewed and observed them also, either when they visited Kerala or via webcam. Indian society traditionally requires that elderly family

members should be cared for and enjoy co-residence with younger family members. When Ahlin indicated she wished to interview these alone seniors, she was met with much assurance that the participants would not want to talk and share the grief of their missing children and grandchildren. Family relations were described as a "delicate topic", a private matter, and any tensions would not be addressed directly. Overall, Ahlin actually found that despite evidence suggesting elderly parents were frequently 'abandoned' and suffering, the majority of her participants were very accepting of her research activity and they functioned quite well by themselves on a day to day basis, mainly thanks to the benefits of information and communication technology. The 'care-collective' of the elderly parents and their distance family had, through shared efforts, produced educated off-spring who could generate higher incomes to support their parents. All parties saw this as a 'win-win' situation, and the physical absence was an acceptable price to be paid. Ahlin's research offers evidence that although distance kinship scenarios do involve a degree of loss, they can be offset by perceived positive benefits.

Closer to home, the writings of Loretta Baldassar, a Perth based scholar, resonate with much of my research and I will frequently engage with her in relation to my data (2007, 2008, 2016). Baldassar and her colleagues remind the reader of the instinctive, traditional and perceived roles and duties, whether 'in-country' or distance, that are attached to the title of 'grandparent'. Each person's version of 'perfect' grandparenthood varies. How they see their roles, duties, status, entitlements, influence, obligations, agency and even expectations of financial support (in either direction) all play an essential part in the journey of every grandparent (Baldassar, Kilkey, Merla & Wilding 2014:163).

Baldassar, Vellekoop, Baldock and Wilding's book *Families Caring Across Borders: Migration, Ageing and Transnational Caregiving* provides a robust, 'down under', Southern Hemisphere framework for the analysis of how transnational families support each other across geographical distance and national borders (2007). It is an example of two-sided research where Baldassar's team interviewed local Perth families along with their transnational kin in Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Singapore, Iraq, Afghanistan and New Zealand; the small last study being the only Kiwi distance

grandparent scholarship of which I am aware (2007:56-64). The context of her research, especially as regards Perth's geographical isolation, offers similarities, but is not identical, to New Zealand. Additionally, she and her colleagues have personal, insider transnational backgrounds which add richness to the understanding of their participants. The authors' key topics include caregiving, communication, emotions and co-presence. An overall theme of Baldassar and her colleagues' writings is that distance kin 'packages' can indeed be messy and complicated, but do not necessarily lead to the demise of intergenerational family relations. Their conclusions discuss models of transnational caregiving acknowledging capacity (ability/opportunity), finance, technology, time, mobility, obligation, negotiated family commitments, supportive kin and life cycles (2007:203-217). A pertinent aspect of their writings is the acknowledgement that within transnational studies the identity and activities of the 'left behind' kin, like my distance grandparents, is rarely analysed in detail.

A consistent finding in all distance grandparenting scholarship is the concept of 'acceptance'; acceptance by the distance grandparents of their transnational 'package' which I will discuss in Chapter 6. With the exception of Bank's participants, all had no control over the distance between their middle generation (2009). The title of distance grandparent was thrust upon them, whether they welcomed it or not. Each set of participants responded in different ways as I found with my own research. In general most distance grandparents reluctantly accept 'their lot'. However, there are enough exceptions to indicate that this kinship model still delivers diversity and surprises.

Summary

The featured scholarship contributes to the limited body of research that examines how distance grandparents navigate and experience their roles. The differing research approaches demonstrate few norms have been established, other than the methodological consistency of qualitative, in-home interviews. The current literature gives only the briefest exposure to New Zealand distance grandparents, who I will argue in Chapter 4 offer their own unique voice of knowing. The outcome of this chapter is that the phenomenon of distance grandparenting is crying out for widespread and thorough attention. Using the analogy of buckling the seat belt in an

aeroplane and giving one's attention to the safety briefing, this thesis now progresses to a discussion of my research methodology and findings.

Chapter 3 – METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into three parts. Part 1 will detail my research methods. Part 2 will examine myself as a resource and Part 3 is an explanation of the interview process. Together they will explain the why, how, when and where of this project.

Part 1 – Qualitative Research

This project utilises two qualitative research methods: autoethnography and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The advantage of this dual approach has been the ability to communicate a broader picture. The findings are blended in an interwoven pattern. Supporting these methods is story telling which dominates the interviews and discourse.

Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln define qualitative research as:

> ...multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials - case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.
> (Cited in Rountree 2017:1)

This definition suggests qualitative research is complicated and complex and in many respects it is. However, it is also simple, natural (or perhaps cultural) and every day; people chatting to people, by asking the right questions in the right place, with the right intent and listening carefully to the responses.

Lawrence Ganong and Marilyn Coleman (2014:452) offer four primary benefits of why qualitative methods are preferable for family research. First, qualitative methods enable the researcher to explore family members' understandings and meanings about their family interactions and relationships. Phenomenologists refer to this as lived

experience. My key question to my participants was broad, setting the scene for them to share the many aspects of their interpretation of the familial role. Second, qualitative methods capture relational processes. How do the participants communicate with distant family members? How do they fill the void of distance? Does the distance even matter to them? Are there advantages? The third benefit is that researchers can learn from families within their context. What is each family's 'package'? How long have the participants been grandparents; in-country and distance? Finally, qualitative methods give a voice to marginalized families. I could not describe any of my grandparents as marginalized, in the sense of being deprived, socially outcast, or less able. However, some have felt marginalized as a distance grandparent in the sense of it being a lonely place, and for this reason, qualitative research enables the participants' silences, if they have them, to have a voice.

Rodolfo Maggio in *The anthropology of storytelling and the storytelling of anthropology* recognizes that there is an increasing call for narrative in contemporary anthropology. He maintains that "all anthropological production is to a certain extent a story" (2014:89). Scholars state that stories are intimate and personal and the way we make sense of lives, actions, history and worlds (Banks 2009:185; Ellis 2004:32; Nesteruk & Marks 2009). I recall, before the start of this project, listening to Carole McGranahan at my first ASAANZ conference share similar wisdom (2018). I wanted to 'make sense' of distance grandparenting … so storytelling was a given. As it eventuated stories appeared 'everywhere'. They created "ah ha" moments resonating with a significant portion of my data findings and gave me direction. When I was unsure of how I should think about an intersection of thoughts, a story would appear and provide an answer, and I will highlight these occasions as I go.

Part 2 – Myself as a resource

Peter Collins (2010) and Collins & Anselma Gallinat (2010) write of the ethnographic self as a resource. Collins argues that there are three preconditions for the self to be considered a resource. First is the need for reflexivity: an awareness that the self is implicated in, or more or less part of 'the field'. My participants and I are distance grandparents. I have an insider understanding of their worlds, but this is not to

assume 'sameness' of our worlds. The second precondition is the centrality of the narrative self. Collins cites Schank that we are each a member of overlapping worlds and our narrative self can bridge the distance between these worlds (2010:237). My participants and myself have stories and once these stories are told they help to explain distance grandparenting. My writing comes with a responsibility to my participants and my readers that these stories are shared carefully and with purpose. The final precondition is a commitment to a dialogic methodology: stories are the cornerstone of ethnography (2010:228-242). It is about knowing the right story to tell at the right time. My reflection here is that the stories I have gathered have value and should be treated with care.

So...what have I 'brought to the table' for this research? Do I meet Collins's criteria? What do I offer scholarship on this topic? How do I contextualize my past and present self in this project? I will define and explain my four criteria of contribution: a naturally curious person, an academic *insider,* an autoethnographer and lastly an ethnographer. I will finish with a recap of my positionality.

A naturally curious person

Ganong and Coleman describe qualitative research methods as perfect for "nosy" scholars who are intensely curious about how and why families do the things they do (2014:457). Even before anthropology entered my world this was me. I am easily entertained at any airport matching arriving passengers with their family and friends. I eye them up and silently make a volley of assumptions and believe I have their whole 'package of life' nicely evaluated. I can relate to Collins, who argues that one is "maintained and sustained through the narrative" and it does not matter whether or not one is actually engaged in ethnography or not (2010:228). I provide this airport example as the wandering worlds of tourism, transnationalism, migration, ex-pat experiences have consistently piqued my curiosity and will influence this thesis.

Insider researcher

> An insider is an individual who possesses *a priori* intimate knowledge of a
> community and its members.
>
> (Hawkins cited in Hellawell 2006:483)

Scholarship argues that this is too simplistic a definition as researchers continuously
balance moments of both insiderness and outsiderness (Bilecen 2013; Van Mol et al.
2013). Additionally, scholars debate that insider researchers are presumed to have
easier access, able to pose more substantial questions and can 'read between the lines'.
There is, however, the potential for bias, over-familiarity and taken for granted
notions left unexplored. Basak Bilecen, on the other hand, claims the power dynamics
are the critical concern (2013:53), while Van Mol et al. (2013:81) discuss the insider-
outsider status as one of fluidity, like dancing the tango.

As I gained a fuller understanding and appreciation of my insiderness, I realized it was
complex, and I can concur with all these opinions. My insiderness certainly gave me
credibility with my participants and the other distance parents I met along the way: I
was one of them, and they trusted me. I did not have to build rapport and they opened
up easily to me, and they still do. Counter to this I know I could too easily make
assumptions about my participants' situations and comments and I needed to
continuously stand back, read and listen again. At one point I considered it might be
prudent to try and 'stand back' from the topic to tone down the impact of my
insiderness. To achieve this, I decided that increasing my understanding of the worlds
of distance children (middle generation) and distance grandchildren would support
this regime. Additionally, as part of my personal, familial role as a distant parent, step-
parent and grandmother, I realized I had been 'delivered on a plate', a special
opportunity to make a greater sense of how life probably is for my distance family –
more than my prior twenty years' hands-on experience has produced.

To broaden my understanding the 'other' I immersed myself for a while in academic
scholarship, mainstream writings, blogs and podcasts focused on ex-pats, migrants
and the globally mobile; from their perspective. This process has both prompted new
questions but also informed me. I was an outsider, viewing distance families through

another lens, more and more realizing there are 'two sides to every story'.
Additionally, my lived distance familying experience has been enriched as I gained a
deeper understanding of the worlds of my distance children and grandchildren. At
times my insiderness felt a little overwhelming. I felt enveloped by it, in all aspects of
my life. I was researching it, living with it: distance grandparenting was 'everywhere'.
Overall though, I would readily admit the advantages of being an insider far
outweighed the disadvantages and I will highlight in this thesis the occasions when
they each occurred.

Autoethnographer

> Autoethnography is a research and reporting method that utilizes a writer's
> personal experiences and history to help analyse, describe, or report on
> cultural, social, or political phenomena. Autoethnography was born from
> ethnography, which objectively reports on a culture using gathered data and
> factual information. Autoethnography, on the other hand, is a reporting
> process that is written subjectively and autobiographically, so that the reader is
> drawn in emotionally, morally, and intellectually. Autoethnography also differs
> from autobiography in that it combines the techniques of research and
> reporting with relevant personal experience and beliefs in order to make a
> cultural phenomenon understandable and relatable for the audience.
> (Hogan 2018)

Autoethnography was, for me, a methodology that lurked during the lead up to my
project. It had received little attention during my undergraduate studies, so this left
me wondering if it was 'proper' or appropriate. At the ASAANZ conference Carole
McGranahan stated, "You are your method"(2018). She grabbed my attention: she was
validating my contemplative thoughts. I decided to go on another self-learning
journey to discover some answers to my doubts and concerns. Carolyn Ellis is a key
scholar for all things autoethnographic (2004, 2007, 2009). Ellis and her academic and
life partner Arthur Bochner are noted as originators of this writing method (Bochner
2014; Bochner & Ellis 2016; Ellis & Bochner 1996, 2011). Their writings empowered me: I
realized life stories, including my own, had a place in academia.

Collins and Gallinat (2010), Qutoshi (2015), Poulos (2013) and Méndez (2013) each provide a comprehensive history and overview of the evolution of autoethnography. Their discourse explains that this writing style is relatively new. Before the 1970s, anthropologists mainly isolated the 'other'. Researchers were neither seen nor heard. The scholars claim that autoethnography comes with no rules; it is less constrained by norms of practice than more established research paradigms. Méndez stated it is the meaning that is crucial, not the delivery of sophisticated scholarship (2013:281). I wanted to write something that most people could read so Méndez's approach supported my research intention. Qutoshi (2015:163) explained the multi-layered, transformative learning process of an autoethnographer's research as awakening and illuminating. Qutoshi's comments made sense of my curiosity about transnational experiences around family relationships and why the thoughts of my impending master's journey tended to sway and swoon.

Initially, I imagined autoethnography would have a modest home in my thesis. Collins and Gallinat, when discussing autoethnography, talk of trends of "making room for the self" (2010:3). How much room is "room," I asked myself? How much of myself and my family should I share?" These questions concerned me. Qutoshi cautions about being too "self-absorbed" (2015:178) and this bothered me. However, my concerns were alleviated through the explanation of Tony Adams and Jimmie Manning (2015) who argue that autoethnographers can use their agency to bring to the table their comprehensive, longitudinal experience, thus extending scholarly knowledge about kinship life. The reality is that I have done more distance grandparenting with more family members for a longer period than any of my participants, and I did not want to waste this resource. As the autoethnographic reflections grew I realized I would need approval from my family. Before I was too far down the track, I broached the subject. My family had always been supportive of my research, but I knew things might change when they saw themselves in print. I took a risk and asked them to read an early draft. Their responses were positive. Most poignant was Son No 1 who admitted he had processed distant grandparenting intellectually, but never emotionally.

In the end, heart-breaking events in my family would transport me to a place where I felt I was 'living my thesis', and autoethnography emerged as a non-negotiable, 'must-

have' part of my methodology. I wanted the readers to come into intimate and emotional contact with distance grandparenting in a way that Keith Berry & Tony E. Adams achieved when exploring family bullies (2016:52-53). Ruth Behar explained it as taking the reader to somewhere they could not otherwise have gone, and I felt the same way (1996:14). Ruth Gibbons (2018:25-26) sums up these thoughts.

> Anthropologists live lives where improvisation and organisation feed and bleed into each other as we seek to understand people's lived experiences. In these moments we give of ourselves, come up against ourselves, improvise ourselves and emerge with learning and experiences.

Ethnographer

> [Ethnography] has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self-as much of it as possible-as the instrument of knowing.
> (Ortner 2006:42)

Anthropologists consistently fail to agree on what ethnography is, and how to define it, but they do concur that ethnography is a complicated activity (Collins 2010:229). There are diverse methods of acquiring data and similarly diverse methods to explain the results. Collin's writings help justify the confusion that was lurking in my mind as I wrestled with thoughts of the methodology of my planned research. Before these were on the drawing board, I was already gathering data. For some time, I had been quietly recording notes and jotting down conversations with family, friends and people I had met somewhere in my travels. This activity had resulted in many post-it notes stories, one-liners and vignettes scribbled in notebooks, archived emails and saved Facebook postings. Jodie Taylor, in her writings on 'intimate insiderness', describes this data as valuable "undocumented historical knowledge" (2011:9 & 18). At times I wondered if it was all a waste of time, but as I have latterly re-read and included some of these musings in this thesis, I can relate to Taylor's comments. Furthermore, during the months of writing, I would bump into other distance grandparents, and some of their conversations have also been included. One could say I was 'in the zone' and these connections were valuable added to my research journey.

Positionality

In *Families Caring Across Borders*, interesting commentary is offered regarding the differing positionality of the six scholars who separately travelled the globe to interview related transnational kin of the Perth based families. The authors explained that the variability or age and ethnicity of interviewers and interviewees, combined with the conduct of the interviewers and interviewees in the context of the research, was relevant to their findings (Baldassar et al. 2007:20-21). Each interview had its own set of particular factors: consequently there was no one set of right findings. My findings are unique to me and my positionality. Having detailed my research methods and discussed myself as a resource, it is now time to stand back and acknowledge the multiple facets which together constitute my own positionality.

I am a mature post-graduate university student with a background in business including many years in the travel industry.

I am an insider, 'native' anthropologist curious about all aspects of global mobility.

I am a researcher with an antenna always on alert for the next distance grandparent I might meet who has a story to tell.

I am a distance grandmother and a parent, likely reflecting more deeply than most on my past and present transnational kinship experiences.

I am a friend of my participants, eager to learn from them, write about their lives and most importantly, at the end of this process, retain, or ideally have enhanced our friendships.

I have a desire to share the knowledge I have acquired via this research process with other transnational families as knowledge is valuable to improving distance familying.

Part 3 – The interview process

My qualitative research entailed in-home, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. I chose 'in-home', rather than an outside location like a cafe, as this is where I thought my participants would likely feel most relaxed. None had family staying with them at

the time: it was 'business as normal' as distance grandparents. I had previously visited some, but not all of their homes, and I viewed it as helpful to engage with them in their own settings. It assisted me to further 'paint a picture' of them and their family. Ganong and Coleman cite Daly offering support to my decision when explaining that family relational dynamics are often hidden from view, and their home is the most "natural" setting (2014:454). Furthermore, in-home interviews are a recommended approach in much qualitative methodological literature (Charenkova & Geovorgianiene 2018:495; Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011:110; Holloway 1997:95). Lastly, as previously highlighted, most previous similar international distance grandparent studies have successfully utilised this multi-sited method which offered further assurance that this approach was the most appropriate one. (Ahlin 2017; Banks 2009:179; Sevier 2013:140; Sigad & Eisikovits 2013:310).

David L. Morgan, in his *Essentials of Dyadic Interviews,* explains that qualitative interviews traditionally involve single participants, or a focus group consisting of several interviewees. Two people (dyadic) interviews, in the case of grandparent couples, do not quite 'fit the mould'. He states that from the researcher's point of view the conversations in dyadic interviews are the source of data, whereas from the participants' points of view these conversations are a chance to exchange ideas and experiences on a subject of mutual interest (2016:9-10). Likewise, Jimmie Manning and Adrianne Kunkel argue that dyadic qualitative methodology can "defy, reinforce, or otherwise challenge or extend" findings generated from other research models. Relevant to my dual qualitative methodology they cite Ngunjiri, Henandez and Chang when explaining that autoethnographic research, in collaboration with dyadic research, can elicit nuanced and highly personal accounts (2015:190-1).

My grandparent couples were interviewed together. This was a deliberate and carefully considered decision. Rosanna Hertz (1995) explain the pros and cons of interviewing couples separately, or apart. She admits there is no absolute right answer, as the data from a separate "his" story and a separate "her" story will not necessarily equal the sum of a couple's story. She concludes that when the interview topic is a shared experience/activity (like distance grandparenting), a combined interview is likely the better option. Additionally, I felt it would be strange to ask one half of the couple to

'make themselves scarce' in their own home while I interviewed the other. And lastly, all the grandfathers were used to socializing with me, but not on a one-to-one basis. Importantly, this method generally ensured participation by the grandfathers, who Hertz notes can be hesitant interviewees (1995). This strategy was successful as all the grandfathers actively contributed to our interview conversations. The wives supported the husbands and vice versa and with just one exception, both remained for the entire length of the interviews. The grandfathers contributed fewer words overall; however, their input was well-considered frequently expressed at a slow and deliberate pace. Their hands-on, day to day engagement with the phenomenon of distance grandparenting contributed a similar, hands-on participation during the interviews.

My participants' responses provided the direction and progression of the interviews. This inductive approach to qualitative research is known as Grounded Theory: start with an area of interest, collect the empirical data, and allow for ideas and theory to develop. Baldassar et al. acknowledge these forms of in-home interviews as being a long way from traditional ethnography involving immersion in a village, or similar, for a reasonable period. They refer to them as an *ethnographic interview*: an opportunity for some "albeit limited, naturalistic participation observation" (2007:18-19). These comments gave me comfort as I felt my pleasant, in-home interview settings would hardly be taxing when compared to colleagues who venture to challenging field sites in, for example, distant foreign countries and cultures. Baldassar validated for me that a warm lounge room, with a cup of tea in hand, was an authentic field site.

Ethics approval

Official ethical guidelines for university research in New Zealand come from two sources: Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ASAA/NZ) and the university, in my case, Massey University. The ASAA/NZ provides both a peer ethics review service along with a formal Code of Ethics. The purpose of the latter is to offer workable guidelines, all the while encouraging good judgement. The critical theme is one of "do no harm". The anthropologist's primary responsibility is to protect their participants' privacy, welfare, honour and dignity (ASAANZ n.d.).

Massey University's Human Ethics Committee is responsible for approving all staff and student research, teaching and evaluation activities. Applications are approved before research commences. 'Higher risk' research involves the full committee reviewing the research application, while a 'low risk' application is completed online, and if it meets all the criteria is approved by the committee's Chair. The research project then comes under the jurisdiction of the student's research supervisors who monitor, guide and advise on all ethical issues (de Laine 2000:130). My research was approved as 'low risk'.

Who are my participants?

Sometime before I began my research in earnest, I commenced compiling a list of potential interview participants which over time, extended to more than I needed for the purpose of my thesis. Fortunately, I was not starting from scratch as I already knew some distance grandparents. They were mainly European *Pākehā* middle-class people who range from still working full-time to fully retired. Their ages ranged from early 60s to their 80s; mainly couples along with a few single grandmothers. I knew many of their 'distance' children and had observed them growing up in New Zealand. In one case I had even visited a distance family in their American home, and their Kiwi parents, one of my participant couples, had visited one of my overseas children in America. I am confident that my ease of access to participants was due to their respect for my identity as a distance grandparent and for 'all the miles' I have done; indeed this was one of the advantages of my insider status.

From this list I decided to exclude those whose 'distant' child currently had a short-term overseas work assignment (1-2 years) and whose intention was to return to New Zealand. My observation of these shorter-term scenarios was that there is an element of in-the-moment adventure, for both the grandparents and distance family, and although all the emotions and challenges of distance grandparenting exist, they are not permanent. Also dismissed were the friends of friends, whom I did not know as I had decided to work exclusively with personal friends, retaining that commonality. I was encouraged by their responses when I casually broached the subject of my research plans and that when I formally approached them for appointments, they were

expecting to hear from me. At no time did I feel that securing appointments would be a challenge. The final tally was seven couples and one single divorced grandmother, two from out of town and the rest from Auckland. The predominance of couples is likely because I am one half of a couple, and much of our socializing is with couples.

Who my participants are not, is as relevant to the research conclusion as who they are. Ethnically, my participants do not represent a cross-section of New Zealand society and indeed not the global population of distance grandparents. I readily admit mine is a small study of one predominant slice of our population – mainly white European *Pākehā*. They are neither underprivileged, nor wealthy. This is relevant as I often refer to the writings of Baldassar and her colleagues, who similarly describe their participants as being in a "reasonably comfortable" situation (Baldassar et al. 2007:84). Knowing that Baldassar's participants are similar to mine provided a comparative framework to the analysis. Most, not all are still able to travel and are currently in a financial position to manage the expense. All remain able to host visiting family. My participants live in their own homes and with one exception have at least one middle generation child and grandchild in New Zealand, as well as having those overseas. This point is relevant to the thesis as I argue that the participants' 'in-country' family is a contributing factor, in mainly positive ways, to my findings.

My distance grandparent participants are referred to by number. I considered using pseudonyms but because I know them all well, calling them by another name felt strange and odd. Furthermore, I considered that eight numbers would be easier for the reader to follow than 17 individual names. When my participants were given an opportunity to read a thesis draft, none was bothered about being referred to by a number. In fact some were amused at their newly acquired title. The numbers correspond to order of the interviews. Christian names that cropped up in conversations were changed. No distinction is made between married and/or de facto couples anywhere. In fact I do not know the marital status of some of the distance middle generation. For ease of reading, I refer to daughters-in-law and sons-in-law,

	Grandparent participants	Approx. number of years I have known participant/s	Approx. number of years of distance parenting	Distant		New Zealand	
				Son or daughter overseas?	Grandchildren	Adult children	Grandchildren
1	Couple	3	23	daughter	1 x toddler	1	2 x teenagers
2	Couple	6	15	daughter	1 x infant	2	1 x teenager
3	Couple	6	23	son	3 x late teens/20s	2	5 x 5 yrs to teenage
4	Couple blended family	27	17	son	4 x late teens/20s	1	2 x teenagers
5	Couple	23	17	son	1 x toddler & baby	2	3 x toddlers
6	Couple blended family	36	3	son	1 x 4 yr old	0	0
7	Single grandmother	7	20	daughter	1 x toddler	1	2 x under 10
8	Couple	18	10	daughter	2 under 5	6	10 x infant - teenagers
Me	Couple blended family	n/a	30	1 x daughter & 2 sons	3 teenager/early 20s & 2 x under 6's	1	1 teenager

Participants' family 'packages'

Figure 2 – Participants' family 'packages' chart

even if they are not married. All the distance families are two-parent (mother and father) families though Grandparent No 4's middle generation couple is divorced and live apart. No grandchild is, at the time of writing, in a permanent relationship.

This chart highlights four critical factors.

1. My participants have been known to me for an average of 14 years, and this was a surprise. My understanding of their distance and 'in country' family situations extends from well prior to my research interviews. During the interviews I could not help but remember our previous chats. We have all had many conversations over the years about our family 'packages' and the comings and goings of our children and grandchildren.

2. There is a column for how many years my participants have been distance parents. This does not necessarily correlate to how many years they have been distance grandparents. Some adult children left home and had

children later. Others got married in New Zealand and then left with a child or two to live overseas.

3. There happens to be an equal spread of distance sons and daughters (and daughters-in-law and sons-in-law) which assists in providing a balanced gender commentary.

4. The chart features the ages of the distance grandchildren. This is relevant for several reasons. First, some of the grandparents are entirely new at the 'distance deal': they had already been 'in-country' grandparents for several years and then along came a distance new-born. Currently, distance grandparenting is 'early days' for them: their grandchildren's personalities are still being formed, and none knows if their grandchild or grandchildren will have any 'Kiwiness' about them. Some grandchildren have not even visited New Zealand yet. Second, communicating with distant infants and toddler grandchildren is problematic and will be expanded on in future chapters. Many of the grandparents have not yet experienced what adults would describe as "a proper conversation" with their distance grandchildren. Third, teenagers and young adults tend to be busy with full lives, and it can be harder to connect at a close level, even with all the available technology.

My research shows that distance grandparenting is complex, and this chart demonstrates eight quite different familial 'packages'. Grandfather No 1, who is also a researcher/academic, quickly summed up the situation when he said: "I was just thinking about all the possible grandchildren and grandparents you could be dealing with, because if you are dealing with your own [grandchildren], they're growing up … like Clive's [my husband] family that are university age. It's a whole different situation from someone who has a toddler".

Interview logistics

In June 2019, I was ready to commence interviewing. Ahead of time, I had prepared two documents on Massey University letterhead. The first was an Information Sheet (Appendix 1) and the second, a Consent Form (Appendices 2 & 3). Marlene de Laine maintains that vulnerability and transparency on the part of the researcher encourages open and fruitful dialogue, and I took her advice(2000:136). The personalized

Information Sheet I developed included a couple of family photos. I reminded my participants of the reasons for my research and why their input was valued. I was open about my positionality and invited them 'on a journey' together. The critical question I planned to ask them was noted, thus allowing them time to ponder potential answers. The consent form assured them confidentiality.

I became aware that some of my participants would soon be travelling to the Northern Hemisphere summer to visit their distance family, so I approached them first. This seasonal pattern of travel seems typical in Southern Hemisphere distance grandparenting circles. I emailed each couple (and single) attaching the Information Sheet and Consent Form. Sometimes I offered two or three potential time slots, and on other occasions I asked for convenient times from their end. Replies were always prompt and positive, and appointments were set in our respective diaries. Once appointments were finalized, they had no further questions which gave me assurance that the documentation was helpful, and they were relaxed about the process.

Later in June, my husband and I were having a holiday break a few hours south of Auckland. My two out of Auckland distance grandparent couple friends could potentially render a very productive interview side trip from our holiday location. I planned to leave my husband behind for the day as I felt that was the professional thing to do. I wanted to be just the interviewer, not a wife as well. Tentative plans were put in place with my friends. However, things changed when the husband of one of the couples was diagnosed with a grave illness. I realized that my husband and I should both visit our ailing friend, and if the interview did not eventuate, it was no longer the priority of the visit. For logistical reasons, my husband was also present at the interview of our 'well', out of town friends, and he quietly took himself off to the next room with a book. I was still able to fully engage as the researcher, and my earlier concerns were unfounded.

Our unwell second friend was in good spirits when we arrived, and we were all set for the interview when the doorbell rang. Mutual friends, whom we had not seen for twenty years, had called by. By the time they stayed for lunch, and we all had a fantastic catch-up, the doorbell rang again, and it was an electrician to discuss an issue

with our hosts. I had, by this stage, assured my grandparent friends we would reschedule, and agreed a Skype chat in a few days would be in order. This plan was executed without problems. Unexpected happenings are part and parcel of in-home interviews, and they were not the last (Baldassar et al. 2007:19). On another occasion, a sister-in-law called by unannounced. She recognized me and joined in the tail end of our conversation. Researchers need to be flexible, adaptable and 'go with the flow', to a certain extent. They also need to be sensitive when it is time to wind things up. I experienced all these situations. I went on to do the other four Auckland based interviews, during July and early August.

I took no notes so as to enable me to fully engage in the conversation. Most grandparents had their consent forms completed, and the others forwarded their consent forms via email. Often a morning tea tray was set out ahead of time. One couple insisted ahead of time, that I should stay on for lunch, which I did. I always felt welcome and expected by everyone. It was never an issue to commence recording using the recording feature of my mobile phone. Fortunately the device picked up the voices well, whether we sat around the dining table or across a lounge room.

I arrived at each interview with a gift-wrapped square of home-made fruit cake, an old family recipe, with an attached back-story photo card (Appendix 4). I hoped that the gift would remind my participants of familial food sensory experiences, traditions and rituals. A gift of this nature is a form of reciprocity, an appreciation of my participants' time and input. Jessica Halley successfully used this technique in her study with Bhutanese women (2014). An unexpected benefit of my cake gift was the thank you emails I sometimes received when they later enjoyed the baking. This created a welcomed opportunity for a casual follow up 'chat'.

All interviewees raised questions about my own family and their current situations as most participants knew my children and these questions were not unexpected. I answered the questions even though I wanted my participants' experiences to be the topic of discussion. Sometimes this dialogue allowed me to speak on an aspect of distance grandparenting and redirect the conversation back to the interviewees. During my home visits I observed, and on some visits, with their permission, photographed how they 'displayed' their distance family in their home, and I will discuss this in more detail in my findings.

My interview question and narrative interviewing

The key, initial interview question to my participants was always: "How is distance grandparenting for you?" There was a reason why I asked this question. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey noted that when participants could talk about themselves, this was a positive experience (2011:74), and that was important to me. I reasoned beforehand, and from personal experience that distance grandparenting might be a lonely place. Each grandparent has their own set of emotions, losses and adjustments, oftentimes keeping them to themselves. I suspected they rarely got asked that question, and I was right.

Phenomenological research assumes we only know about other people's experience (of a phenomenon) by the way they express it (Eastmond 2007:249; Mattingly & Lawlor 2000:4). Following on, Max Van Manen explains: "The lifeworld, the world of lived

experience, is both the source and the object of phenomenological research" (2016:53). Cheryl Mattingly and Mary Lawlor argue the importance of "eliciting stories" when trying to understand someone else's experiences (2000:4). To conduct a study of a lived experience (like distance grandparenting) the researcher needs to "orient oneself" in a determined way to the question and meaning of the role: nothing can be assumed. The meaning (of distance grandparenting) therefore, needs to be "*found*" in the experience of distance grandparents. If nothing is assumed, then all that remains is the lived experience (Van Manen 2016:53).

My research question appears simple, however, can be interpreted in many ways. For example, if one places an emphasis on a particular word the nature of the enquiry alters. When I verbalised the question, I tried not to put an emphasis on a particular word. The participants chose how they would interpret my line of questioning: their thinking was never 'boxed in'. The outcome is that across the interviews many aspects of distance grandparenting were raised, from all different angles. Their roles as distance grandparents were similarly expressed in a cross section of ways. Findings had both commonality and differences, along with some surprises.

My insider status adds a complication to this theory though. As a long-time friend of most of my participants I arrived at my interviews with a familiarity of their family situations that a regular, independent researcher may not possess. Mattingly and Lawlor explain that stories have a beginning, middle and the end (2000:6). My stored knowledge created a challenge for me when I became aware, on occasions, that my participants were discussing the "middle" and the "end", but I knew there was a "beginning" that was relevant to the story. I chose when this occurred to gentle raise what were difficult 'beginning' topics and our conversations continued as a 'whole'. It was the inclusion of these "beginnings" that helped form my argument that distance grandparenting is a complex 'package' of many factors. The lived experience nature of my research continued after the formal interviews when some participants deliberately contacted me with the sole purpose of 'bringing me up to date' with their latest family happenings and how they were navigating their roles.

Transcribing and analysing text

All recordings were transcribed during the week or so following each appointment. I highlighted in bold comments that I considered particularly pertinent, and I made a notation when the conversation took a side trip. Transcriptions were prepared in *Word* files on my desktop computer and saved, via a password, in a cloud-based server.

Scholars describe the research process as a continuous interplay, or circular activity, between the data collected and the analysis (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011:208; Holloway 1997:80-81; LaRossa 2005; Pulla 2014:15). This warning was helpful, and I was grateful for the lengthy task of transcribing as it afforded me extended thinking and reflecting time. Analysing the data is about looking for commonalities and the frequency of certain themes in participants' responses, thus leading to 'typifying' the results (Banks 2009:180) and this is the method I adopted. Conversations were colour-coded according to topics, which led to the emergence of themes as furnished in this thesis.

Ganong and Coleman explain that family researchers carry their participants' stories in their heads for weeks, and even months until they make sense in a coherent way (2014:457). Indeed, gems of comments and stories emerged and bumped around in my brain for weeks with no sense of order. Then, gradually, these thoughts aligned themselves. It was beneficial that the interviews were spread over several weeks, and I was not overwhelmed with the process.

Before the interview process, I was cautious as to how I would navigate my ongoing friendships with my participants being mindful that what was shared during the interview was confidential, and not a subject for a social chat where others may be present. As Ganong and Coleman (2014) acknowledge qualitative family research is sometimes "messy" and requires tact and respect for the participants. Ellis (2007) and de Laine (2000:112-3) also acknowledge this dilemma and offer sound advice regarding interviewing friends: a tightrope act of moral obligations, secrecy and professional scholarly demands. The scholars' commentary was reassuring; however, in the end, my

concerns were unwarranted. All interviews were trouble-free, and our friendships unaffected. In fact they have been enhanced.

Participants read my thesis

Pink (2015) suggests that sensory ethnography, and I would add any ethnography with a strong emotional context, comes with particular ethical concerns. She says a collaborative approach is fundamental. Senses and emotions should not be studied but instead explored and identified with the support of the participants (2015:68). This has been done as my participants were afforded an opportunity to read this thesis, in draft form, before its submission. I wanted to ensure I had interpreted everything correctly. When I decided a draft was starting to head down the 'home straight' I printed eight copies and individualised them with tabs highlighting each page where the grandparents featured. I prepared a personalized note for each one asking them to either briefly read the highlighted sections or read as much as they like of the whole thesis. It was scary to break out of my safe thesis bubble and expose my work, warts and all, to my participant friends amongst whom were a number of academics, including two professors. The thesis they read still had a large degree of roughness and they would know, at a glance, a detailed copy edit was still required. However, there was a method to my plan. I wanted them to feel free to comment which they might have been hesitant to do, had they received the final shiny version. This strategy was successful, and I received well-considered and welcomed commentary by email or telephone. All participants appreciated reading my and the others' stories and it helped them better accept their own situations. The two grandmothers who were tearful during my interviews admitted to being teary again. The participants gave me their blessings, and if I were to consider attempting a similar research project again, I would likely follow the same approach as I found it fruitful, settling and reassuring.

Summary

This chapter has explained that my choice of qualitative research methodologies was cloaked in a degree of personal befuddlement and questioning. My pathways were not necessarily obvious, and it took extra delving and learning about the 'other side' of

global mobility and the methodology of autoethnography before I arrived at a place where I could stand back as a researcher and discern a way of best researching how distance grandparenting is for my participants and myself. Scholars' writings provided reassurance that my concerns were valid, and guideposts that my final research plan was appropriate. Once this was achieved, the interview process proceeded in a trouble-free manner and an explanation of each step has been furnished. I will now discuss the findings of my research.

Chapter 4 – THEMATIC FINDINGS

In this chapter I introduce some background thinking and thematic findings that are interwoven through my thesis. I include them, prior to the formal data chapters, as I believe they offer a valuable framework of reference. I explore:

1. Parenting and in-country family
2. Distance
3. How far is far?
4. New Zealand's unique location
5. 'Place'
6. The ethnographic present: change is a constant companion
7. Adjustments
8. Loneliness

These themes are intended to allow the reader to begin to enter the living and thinking 'space' of a Kiwi, long haul distance grandparent.

Distance parenting & in-country family

Despite the purposeful direction of my interview questions, and my desire to keep 'on topic' during my appointments, two things consistently occurred. First, my participant grandparents talked just as much about their role as parents (distance and in-country), as that of grandparents. I soon discerned that their relationships with their middle generation children were the priority and dominated their day to day thinking. The title 'grandparent' automatically assumes there is also a parental relationship present somewhere, and I thought that implied connection would be sufficient for the purpose of my thesis. However, the reality is that the parenting relationship occupies a more dominant place in the equation. I had not thought this through in relation to my research, but on reflection and considering my own situation, this is completely understandable. When I wake each morning, I wonder how my children are, before I think about my grandchildren. This does not lessen the value of a discussion of distance grandparenting: it is just the reality of the context.

Second, the distance grandparents also talked at length about their in-country family. Once again, this part their family 'package' is just as important to them as their distance family, and this is also understandable. By way of example, when I sat down with Grandparents No 3, I was presented with a carefully typewritten document; a helpful family-tree check list of names, birth dates, home locations and other details of both the distance and in-country family. It was my visit to Grandparents No 8 that solidified my thoughts here. Grandfather No 8, father of seven, made me think.

> Well, I feel like a bit of a fraud [as an interviewee] really because we've only got two [distance grandchildren]. We have got twelve grandchildren [altogether] and only two overseas. As we jokingly said, when we went through English customs a year ago…The guy was stamping our passports and we said we were here to see our grandchildren and the guy said it must be very hard [...] travelling all this way. "Oh we have another nine at home [and one on the way]". So sure…we miss the ones in England but when we want a dose of it [grandparenthood], we can't have any sort of gathering here without at least five in Auckland, and often there are more. So I'm not sure what to say [at this interview]. We miss the two in London, but we've now got so many [here]. Is that terrible?

Grandfather 8's reflections certainly went down a different path from most of my participants, but on the other hand they provide evidence that the participants' family that resides at home matters and affects how distance grandparenting 'is'. The topic of distance grandparenting remains the focus of my research findings, however, in time I decided to include in my title the concept of 'transnational, inter-generational familying', to justify the prevalence of references to both distance and in-country middle family.

Distance

> I, myself, want to be an active part of the lives of my grandchildren. I want to be part of their daily scenery and want them to be part of mine. I want them to remember me bending over their cots, mumbling as I change their napkins

[diapers]. I want to praise their advances into the world, applaud their first words, tell them stories and listen to them when they begin to tell their own. I want to pin pictures especially drawn for me on my walls. Of course, there are elements of unconscious egotism in all this, for one's family represents part of self, but self successfully set free from self – detached, launched and independently at large in the world.

(Mahy 2000:38-39)

Mahy's ponderings offer wisdom, clever observations and some home truths, all from the perspective of what she, as a grandparent, both openly and secretly desires. The last sentence is especially poignant and causes mixed grief for distance grandparents. As parents we want our children to be self-sufficient and independent as this is both an outward sign of 'successful' parenting and consoling for us. Could it be though, that Kiwi distance grandparents want the trappings of this parental success, but would reluctantly concede they would prefer there were reins on how far away "at large in the world" actually is? There is no denying however, that distance has created a yearning in our nation's people to 'see the world', and we are also a nation of travellers. One of my participants reminded me of Geoffrey Blainey's book, *The Tyranny of Distance.* This historical account of Australia offers many parallels to New Zealand. Blainey explains that the likes of Australia and New Zealand are isolated from the world's centres of global influence, and this distance has a way of asserting its authority (2001).

The OE (Overseas Experience), or working holiday has been a rite-of-passage for several decades (Bell 2002, Inkson & Thorn 2011; Myers & Inkson 2003; Wiles 2008; Wilson et al. 2010) and in 1979/80 I partook myself, 'pulling pints' and waitressing in Edinburgh and London pubs. The OE still exists, however, this 'there-and-back' phenomenon is not as predominant now, and today's young global citizens are more often seeking semi-permanent or permanent career focused employment overseas (Inkson & Thorn 2011). These are the middle generation of this study; our 30-50 something daughters and sons embracing the new ease of globalisation.

How far is far?

What qualifies a grandparent to be a distance grandparent? What have been other scholars' geographical criteria? Sevier's Hawaiian based Indian grandparents had family in unspecified mainland U.S.A. locations (2013). An online Expedia (2019) search indicates their journey to be as short as a 5 hr 30-minute flight to west coast cities or a considerably longer itinerary with two or three connections to the east coast of America. Sigad and Eisikovit's east coast American grandparents visiting family in Israel would incur the minimum of a 10 hr 30-minute non-stop flight (Expedia 2019). Bangerter and Waldron's American based research, on the other hand, explained 'distance' as 'making it very difficult, or impossible to see each other every day' (2014:90). In reality, and as their research confirms, this could be as close as the other side of a large city, or across several states and time zones.

When deciding on the 'long haul' aspect of my study, I considered Hawaii (8 hr, 30 min) and Perth, Western Australia (7 hr 30 min) as my 'long haul', east/west thresholds (Air NZ.com 2019). I applied this criterion when selecting my participants to ensure their situations were similar. In the end, the distance families of my participants happen to reside in England, Europe and U.S.A., requiring flying times of 19 – 30 hours (Expedia 2019). Short haul grandparenting and long haul grandparenting share many of the challenges I will mention in this thesis. However, the significant difference between the two is that finances permitting, short haul distance grandparents and their families can reasonably easily visit each other for a weekend: a valuable psychological advantage and benefit. I had several potential distance grandparent participants with family on the east coast of Australia, but they 'did not qualify' and what is more – they understood.
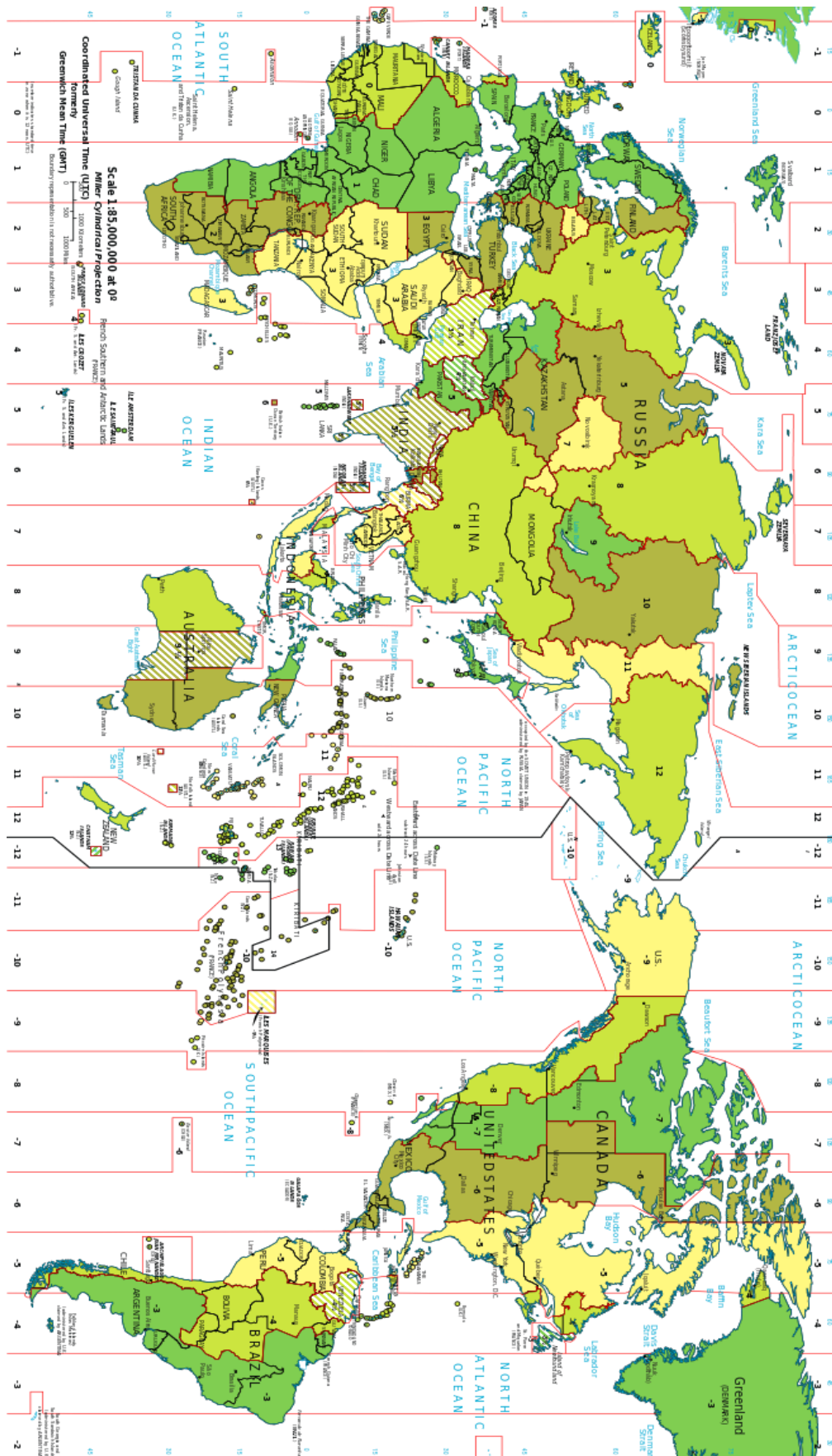
New Zealand's unique location

New Zealand's geographical 'positionality' is worth reflecting on. New Zealand, as a global home for distance grandparents offers uniqueness, and I attribute this to five factors. First, there is no arguing that we sit a long way from much of the world. It feels that way when you live in New Zealand and when we travel overseas, people you

meet often comment the same. As described humorously at a family wedding speech by the visiting American father-in-law: "New Zealand is the last rock on the earth" (O'Donoghue 2011). Second, and very significantly, New Zealand sits almost exclusively in its own time zone. Time zones affect the ease of transnational communication and feature frequently in ongoing chapters. A time zone map offers another couple of territories that are also, with a few small exceptions, in an exclusive time zone: India and Alaska. The bottom line is that all, not just some, distance grandparents in New Zealand (and India and Alaska) must contend with time zone issues, no matter where their distance children live. By comparison, grandparents living in Western Australia are in the same time zone as family who may live in China, Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia and parts of Russia. Similarly, the United Kingdom is only an hour different from South Africa, and east coast America is in the same, or an hour or so different, from most of South America. For a fair proportion of distance grandparents in each of these territories, time zones have little impact on their transnational familying. A time zone map is included to demonstrate this analysis.

Third, when it is winter in the Southern Hemisphere, it is summer in the Northern Hemisphere. Likewise, the school year starts in February in New Zealand, while for much of the Northern Hemisphere it begins in September. The Southern Hemisphere is a more calendar year focused region, while the Northern Hemisphere's summer creates bookends to many employment and education regimes. These differences create constant planning challenges especially once grandchildren are at school and travel bookings need to focus around school terms. A Christmas visit in either direction will always be penalised by more expensive airfares and it is simply not feasible for Northern Hemisphere school age grandchildren to enjoy an extended summer break in New Zealand, when they have just a two-week school break.

Fourth we have the twice-yearly adjustments for daylight saving. Many countries have this regime, and for a few weeks during the transitional periods of March/April and September/October, when everyone is changing, it causes confusion, and one is never quite sure who is on what time.

Figure 4 – Standard time zones of the world

The last and significant factor sits alongside New Zealand's eastern border: the International Dateline. This zigzagging, 180-degree meridian imaginary line was decided upon in 1884 in Washington, D.C. at the International Meridian Conference where 26 countries attended. It was purposely selected due to the area's sparse population (timeanddate.com: n.d.). From a Kiwi's perspective, during the few shared daylight hours of countries in North and South America, we are each on a different day of the week. When it is Sunday daytime in New Zealand, it is Saturday daytime in the Americas.

When all these factors are considered, Kiwi distance grandparents collectively, must fly many miles all the while navigating seasonal hemisphere variations. Furthermore, when communicating with family, allowance must be made for time zones, daylight saving and the international dateline. The bottom line is that every available transnational geographical inconvenience or barrier that exists in the world is experienced by Kiwi distance grandparents. They could, in a light-hearted way, be likened to elite global athletes. The voices of Kiwi distance grandparents are voices of knowing what the 'distance' of distance grandparenting and all its boundaries and barriers entails.

'Place'

Sarah Pink's broad scholarship on the senses contributes a theoretical framework to several areas in my findings (2010, 2011, 2015). She explains 'place' as a "coming together and 'entanglement' of persons, things, trajectories, sensations, discourses, and more" (2015:48). In a complementary vein to this research, Edward M. Bruner, in his discussion of cultural tourism, talks of the problems of doing ethnography in transnational spaces (2005:232). These scholars' comments provided clarity for the thoughts that I was having: 'place' for distance grandparents is multi-sited and I argue consists of four interwoven performance locations, each with their own set of space and kinship dynamics:

1. Their 'empty' New Zealand home.

2. Their 'full' New Zealand home, hosting distance family and/or local family.

3. The 'full' distance, middle generation home of an overseas visit by the distance grandparents.

4. The virtual 'home'; the co-presence of cyberspace which will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Pink goes on to say that 'place' is also the context we as researchers inhabit, as we analyse and communicate our research with others: "malleable and flexible" non-static tools with different kinds of subjectivity (2015:48 & 58). I mention this as my participants unknowingly regularly visit the 'site' of my research. They come and go in my thoughts, oblivious to what is happening in my thesis-writing bubble. Latterly, when I have bumped into them, I have needed to restrain myself from saying, "I have been thinking about you". It was these scholars' comments that made me realize that 'place' for distance grandparents is physically and psychologically multi-sited.

Ethnographic present and change is a constant companion

Denzin uses a photograph as an analogy to explain the phenomenon of the ethnographic present. He writes that a photograph, like ethnographic text, is a fixed representation of thoughts expressed by a subject, in a particular time, at a particular place (1997:44). Roger Sanjek (1991) refers to the ethnographic present as a mode of presentation and includes in his discussion the relevance, or otherwise, of the likes of historical events and other outside factors.

Distance grandparenting can change in an instant. My research occurred during mid-2019 and that is what I have reported. However, the circumstances of distance grandparenting and how we each feel about the role, change all the time. The tearful participants could just as likely be upbeat the next day, and the ones who were robust and stoic could easily feel a little melancholy on another occasion. I have known many of the participants for several years and witnessed emotions that waver in just the same way that mine do. One day, for me, distance grandparenting is not a problem, and the next day something happens, or there is a problem on the other side of the world, and it all changes. On occasions, during the interviews, a comment was shared

that made me recall a past conversation with the same person, about the same subject, and I would realize that 'things have changed' in their life. Similarly, things changed during the time of my research and writing. I have included 'updates' on featured stories as life events further unfolded over time. As explained by Adams and Manning, "Even the best ethnographers would have a limited snap-shot from which to assess and draw conclusions about a family [...]" (2015:357). Furthermore, Ingrid Connidis goes as far as cautioning academics from delivering hard and fast theorical positions around family tie relationships which inevitably change over time (2015:81).

My research data is both a 'slice of time' (ethnographic present) but also a myriad of small and significant events, happenings and changes on the periphery. When family dynamics are on the table, and distance is added to the equation, every family can be 'just one skype call away' from a new regime, a better communication system, some difficult words or a crisis or tragedy of sorts. The 'slice of time', or ethnographic present aspect of distance grandparenting research is a critical factor in my thesis. To some degree, it is the longevity of my insider status that affords me the ability to say this as I have some knowledge of both the past and the present of my research participants.

Adjustments

Distance grandparenting involves continuous, over-the-time adjustments. Daniel Miller in his commentary about the comfort of things includes a reflection on new parenthood. He explains from personal experience, and that of his participants, that three beings are born simultaneously: the infant, but also the parents and in particular the mother (2008:147). Simultaneously is the adjusting and maturing of the parents, and also the grandparents. The confronting possibility of children and grandchildren living thousands of miles away can evoke grim, unsettled feelings and ongoing wavering expectations. The distance grandparents I interviewed for this thesis talked of change and adjustment. This is illustrated by Grandmother No 1 after she was given an opportunity to read this thesis.

I am happy with my [earlier] comment as it is – it was true when I spoke to you. However, now that our granddaughter has been in New Zealand and spent time with us her interactions and conversations are much more directed towards us, with specific statements and questions relating to us. This could, of course, also be because she is older now.

Loneliness

Distance grandparenting (and distance parenting) can, from time to time, be a lonely experience as the next chapters indicate. There is the obvious loneliness of not having all one's family near: that is a given. However, there are other forms loneliness and one example is the place of one's thoughts. A high-profile example is the fate of Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall and their relationship with grandson Archie: a very public relationship while perhaps a lonely place of mixed emotions.

In a different way, early plans are being relayed to me about No 2 Son's wedding in the U.S. which is just over a year away. This far ahead I have no idea if any New Zealand family or friends will be in attendance. The prospect feels rather lonely. Will we be the only Kiwis there?

Even the temporary presence of visiting family can ironically create a form of isolation and loneliness. When I have overseas family visit, my local friends and extended family, showing lots of consideration and knowing how precious the time is with our visiting relatives, give us a wide berth. The phone does not ring, there are no dinner invitations or texts asking if we feel like a walk. For a few days or a week or two we are figuratively in a bubble of distance family presence created by the kindness and consideration of our local family and friends who, over time, have acquired an appreciation of our family 'package'. When they see a Facebook airport departure post, the phone begins to ring again. Loneliness is not directly addressed by my participants, but the reader will sense that on occasions loneliness could be considered a psychological 'place' of distance grandparenting.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to place front and centre stage a conceptual framework of ideas which has informed this thesis. These themes will continue to re-appear through discussions of my findings illustrating the uneven terrain of distance grandparenting. The next five chapters are devoted to the formal data, and feature the topics of communication, emotions, relationships, 'being there', practical issues and reflections on the past and present.

Chapter 5 – COMMUNICATION ROUTINES

An outsider's perspective of distance grandparenting is often summed up in a well-meaning, candid remark like "well, there's always Skype", the magical solution to keeping in touch. Video communication has certainly transformed transnational family communication (Baldassar et al. 2017:3), however, it is not as simple as dialling up whenever one feels like a chat. Azadeh Forghani and Carman Neustaedter confirm the value of grandparent-grandchild transnational communication, but observe it is not without its challenges (2014:4185), and many of the stories and conversations I share in these findings chapters acknowledge these issues. When I interviewed my participants, their transnational communication routines were a much talked about subject and often the first topic they raised. For that reason, communication is the focus of this first findings chapter. I will discuss supporting scholarship and then move to my findings and the supporting responses from my participants.

When initially reading transnational communication academic articles, I was attracted to one analysing grandparent/grandchild usage of three communication mediums: face-to-face, phone and email. It was not until I thoroughly read Holladay and Seipke's 2007 article, that I realised 'face to face' was not video communication; it was 'in the flesh'. An online search concluded that Skype was created in 2003 (Whent 2012). As quickly as scholars publish their work, aspects of it are out of date. Improved communication platforms are delivered, new applications are rolled out, smartphones become even smarter, and importantly, at the human level, the acceptance, understanding and embracing of new technology gathers momentum. I found myself putting to one side communication scholarship that made no mention of video communication, as it was simply out of date with today's reality.

Another challenge I struck when searching for scholarship related to the fact that six of my eight participants (couples/single) have grandchildren under 5. Indeed, by four years of age, it is possible to have quite a civilised conversation (Vutborg et al. 2011), and one of my grandparent couples testified to this. However, it requires an adult to initiate the call, and diligent supervision that the device is not tampered with by the child. As explained by one of my grandmothers, the only way she can 'communicate'

with her toddler granddaughter is when the infant is safely secured in the highchair, and her mother holds the phone. My toddler grandsons, left to their own devices, would have me experiencing motion sickness from the constant handling of their mother's phone. To date little scholarship has focused on distance communication with young grandchildren.

Finally, Baldassar et al. importantly acknowledge that their transnational communication research is with participants who want to stay in touch (2007:109). Broken, fractured families are perhaps challenging and possibly few are willing participants for a researcher. Allowing for these various conundrum, the communication focused scholarship I discuss below is, I believe, current to today's context.

Helena Hurme, Susanne Westerback and Tatiana Quadrello (2010) focused on both demographical aspects and the modes of grandparenting communication of their Finnish grandparents, connecting with their grandchildren (aged 11-13 and 16-17 years) some of whom lived some distance away. Distance, or proximity between the two generations was defined as the most significant predictor of their results, however, there was no clear definition of what 'distance' is. The impression the reader is left with is that the grandparents and grandchildren all lived in Finland and some were geographically closer than others. This raises my earlier question of "How far is far? How do you define 'distance'? The writers went as far as stating that new communication technology "almost made the concept of distance obsolete" (2010:275). My participants indicated that when it was convenient and practical to use technology there was a sense that the distance was briefly obsolete, however, these are fleeting moments. This scholarship contributes to discussions regarding the ability and willingness of seniors to embrace ever-changing technology and how their actions enhance and support grandparent/grandchildren relationships, however, in any discussion regarding distance kin relationships there are many other, besides technology, that can affect relationships

Skype was the focus of Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain's (2015) scholarship. She considers how Skype allows transnational families to create spaces of

transconnectivity via the continuous use of Skype; keeping it turned on while life goes on around the device. She concluded that distance emotions of love and longing are deintensified through this practice. I have occasionally tried this regime during a family meal gathering. However, for example, when the distance adult grandchild is dressed in pyjamas eating cornflakes, and we are enjoying an evening meal with a glass of wine, there is a sense of befuddlement. This provides an example that some methods of communication work better than others and there are periods of trial and error. None of my participants mentioned they keep Skype 'turned on' in this way, however, I am certainly aware it is a valuable connecting tool for some.

Forghani and Neustaedter (2014) review the communication routines and needs over distance, between grandparents and grandchildren aged 3 to 10 years. They raise the concept of parental support and the pros and cons of grandparents offering to babysit remotely, albeit briefly. This involves a grandchild being convinced to sit still and the distance grandparent maybe reading them a book or having a one-on-one chat via a device while the parent attends to a household task nearby, or in a different room. This regime offers potential benefits to all parties, however, it was not necessarily an easy task for the grandparents. On one hand the grandparents preferred less parental supervision of their calls, but also admit to sometimes asking too many questions, while other times not always knowing what to say.

There is an encouraging increase in scholarship regarding distance grandparents' growing confidence with the use of information technology. A review of contemporary articles, all with different global connection points, delivers an expected trend that as time passes, there is less, or even no mention regarding grandparent digital competency (Baldassar 2016; Ivan & Hebblethwaite 2016; Khvorostianov 2016). Grandparents who are uncomfortable with devices, other than a regular landline telephone are becoming fewer. However, they still exist as Jurate Charenkova and Violeta Gevorgianiene (2018:499) found during their recent research in a Lithuanian rest home. This is not the norm. All my participants are reasonably competent with technology, or at least have achieved a level of confidence with the basics that they can function within their family units. Smartphones, iPads, laptops and desktops were visible in their homes.

My participants use a cross-section of applications including Facetime, Skype, Facebook Messenger, email, text and WhatsApp and I have made a deliberate decision to focus little on the ins and outs of each application. I noticed that my participants' terminology was sometimes mixed up. Often the word "Skype" was used when the platform was Facetime, and occasionally there was confusion with other application names. I gained the impression that exactness, when referring to terminology was not a priority. What devices my participants owned, and which platforms they used, did not matter to them. They had each established a workable package of technology, tools and competency to support their distance family communication regimes, and that was their priority. No one gave me the impression that technology was an obstacle or concern for them. I agree with Loredana Ivan and Shannon Hebblethwaite (2016) that when researching older peoples' engagement with technology, there is little to be gained by singling out one device or platform. These observations support an anthropological theory of polymedia in the context of transnational family communication. Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller explain the Greek word *poly* means many, or several (2012:170); that is many communication mediums. The scholars argue that this term has emerged as a way to describe and understand the proliferating communication opportunities available and how they affect communication. No longer is cost a factor to keeping in touch, rather it is which platforms work best at an emotional and functional level for each kinship package.

Time zones

A Google Scholar search of 'time zones' along with 'family communication' reveals little dedicated scholarship, other than one article by Xiang Cao (2013). This is surprising considering the impact time zones have on transnational communication and globalisation as a whole as discussed in Chapter 4. This situation suggests it is a topic that deserves greater attention.

Most of my participants had what Cao describes as "soft routines" to initiate family communications. Moveable, flexible schedules and platform mediums evolve and change depending on the age of the children and schedules of each household and of course, the various geographical boundaries and ever-present time zone differences.

There was a pattern to their communication; a time of the day or week when, if all things work out, both households chat: their ideal communication medium being video chat. Sometimes the grandparents would initiate communication, but most times, this task fell to the parents. No one family operated the same as another. Frequently chat 'appointments' would be scheduled in advance by email or text. Cao also points out that it is necessary to have a reasonable knowledge of the typical daily schedule of their remote family, which my grandparent participants had (2013:127 & 137). His scholarship engages at a genuine human level, talking about the sensitivity and awareness of time zones and how family values are affected by time zones.

Vutborg et al. (2011) describe times zones as troublesome, restrictive and stubborn. Raelene Wilding claims time zones hamper spontaneity (2006:131). This is the sort of language my participants used. However, when I reviewed my transcripts, I was surprised by how few times my participants spoke of time zones and how little conversation time was devoted to the subject. I put this down to two reasons. My participants did not need to spend any time explaining to me the ins and outs of their own time zone situation: they knew I totally understood. This is a situation where my insiderness may have fast tracked interview conversations. It also was not because time zones were not relevant, it is more a case that time zone issues are such a non-negotiable aspect of distance grandparenting, from a New Zealand perspective, perhaps there was little point in dwelling on the subject. All my grandparent participants reluctantly accept that time zones are a necessary evil – one of those things you must work around.

> **Grandmother No 5**: "It is not as easy to communicate when you feel like it. The time zone thing is the hardest thing because there are times when you think I just want to have a chat now. I just want to talk about whatever and you realise this isn't going to work. They're asleep or whatever." Grandmother No 5 goes on to explain that when a call is finally synchronised, she might not want to talk about whatever it was anymore. "And so, I sort of feel cheated. I haven't been able to do that...darn...It's the time zone thing again."

The main challenge for all my grandparent participants is the small window of opportunity available for synchronised voice/video communication. The grandparents with small grandchildren in London, for example, alternate every six months from communicating in their morning, to communicating in their evening, as daylight saving, at both ends, adjusts the time difference between eleven and thirteen hours. This is highlighted in the following stories.

My Daughter No 2 works fulltime, and our grandsons are in day-care. The only time it is both the weekend in the U.S. and also the weekend in New Zealand are a few hours on our Sunday morning. Should this clash with other plans, at either end, then it is another week before a relaxed chat is possible.

Grandparents No 6 treasured regular 'before school' sessions with their four-year-old granddaughter in England. "She has had breakfast, and she is in her school uniform". They are babysitting from afar while their son is busy doing something else in the house and their daughter-in-law has already left for work. "Actually, it is very precious time…We interact almost as if she is here" Grandfather No 6 recounts. An interesting postscript to this story is that a few months later, when I asked after their granddaughter, the grandmother reported that the English weekday morning routine had changed. Their granddaughter was out the door just after seven with Mum now, and there is no time for chats. Due to early bedtime and daylight-saving conversations, calls are restricted now to weekends. This supports my argument about how distance grandparenting is, is ever-changing. Ethnographic presence of my interview produced one set of findings, while just a few weeks later the communication regime had to change. Distance grandparenting involves constant change.

Cao asserts that time zone distances pose more challenges than geographical distances for remote families (2013:128). On a day to day basis this is understandable, but it is also important to acknowledge that long distance travel becomes perhaps a physical and/or financial impossibility for some. At least time differences remain a constant in this situation and can be worked around if the desire to communicate from both sides is strong enough.

Communication and small children

When small children are involved, communication can be 'hit and miss', an issue that will be raised again in Chapter 8.

> **Grandfather No 1:** [...] in fact there are two conversations getting in the way of each other. And I get pretty frustrated because we blokes, we like our rational, orderly conversations...so my earnest, rational questions get swallowed up with this kind of baby dialogue.

> **Grandmother No 1:** Is she happy to see us or is it just her mother's laptop is in a place where she can play with it as normally it is in a place where she can't get to it? [...] I have tried reading stories on skype because it's morning with them and she's so active that she wouldn't sit for a story. I am hoping I will get back into that from distance.

> **Grandmother No 5:** So, when they are feeding Alice at 6 o'clock-ish...they might ring me while they are feeding Alice in her highchair, so she is in one place...she doesn't sit still.

I have gone through phases of attempting to read a book via Facetime to my small grandsons in America. On one occasion, Daughter No 2 was trying to potty train the two-year-old. We convinced him to sit on the potty, outside on the deck, and she propped up the phone. I read a story book with my phone camera focused at my end on each page. Miraculously he sat still, did not mess with my daughter's phone and 'produced the goods'. It was a 'red-letter day' to be a distance grandmother.

As mentioned earlier, Vutborg et al. (2011) report that when children reach around four, they start to become aware of what you are wearing and the fact we are experiencing opposite climatic seasons. Grandparents No 6 commented that their four-year London based granddaughter had become aware of the opposites of night and day, and seasonal variations. Similarly, I have been asked if I am cold because I had a jumper on when my toddler grandsons were in t-shirts.

Cao also talks of some time zones that are more helpful than others. The family of Grandmother No 5 live in the same U.S.A. time zone as my own young grandsons. By the time we have woken up in New Zealand it is well into the afternoon in the States (and a day behind). We can all too often find ourselves talking when toddlers are still grumpy from an afternoon nap or during the 'bewitching hour' of dinner time. It can be a troublesome time of the day to communicate with little ones. We never have the benefit of well rested infants who have just had a good night's sleep. That is the luxury bestowed upon New Zealand grandparents with grandchildren in the time zones of Asia.

Household chats

Even adult communication can have a degree of 'hit n miss'.

> **Grandfather No 2:** I find phone calls sometimes difficult and often [they] are chatting while you are doing something else, and not looking at each other ... like sitting in a car going somewhere. Sometimes you get a better conversation ...[when the conversation is prearranged].

Communication connections may or may not involve all members of each household. Grandparents No 1 shared an amusing story. During most of their Sunday video chats, their son-in-law was absent. Grandmother No 1 explained "They have this very nice arrangement where on weekends they take turns to have a lie in [or look after the toddler]. So, one of them takes Saturday and the other takes Sunday". The grandparents do not see the son-in-law until he comes down for breakfast. For the grandparents this means they have some dedicated video time with just their daughter and grandchild before they all catch up as a family.

Two of the grandfathers had their independent communication routines with family members, and this is worth noting as scholarship exists maintaining that grandmothers are more proactive grandparents (Jappens & Van Bavel 2016:454; Pollet 2007; Timonen & Arber 2012:8). Grandfather No 3 wanted "to be the one" to email one adult granddaughter. She is his "responsibility", and this relationship is special to him. However, her email responses are always addressed to Grandad and Grandma, which

is appreciated by them both. Likewise, Grandfather No 5 has three sons, and one resides overseas. The grandfather frequently uses his drive time, to or from work, to "ring his boys", including his American son. No calls are pre-arranged, and he is adamant all boys should be treated the same. He has no pattern as to who he might catch up with. If the boys are busy when he phones, they will say so. Right now, while his American son comes home from work for lunch, which conveniently coincides with the grandfather's morning drive-time, that routine works well.

Interestingly, Grandmother No 5 never rings her distance son, or daughter-in-law unannounced. "I don't call my boys up because you don't know...it's probably a difficult time. They are probably this or that, and they won't be wanting their Mum to call". Instead, she might email and say "I'd like to have a chat. Let me know when it is a good time to call." In fairness this hesitancy could exist even with in-country family, however, with the added factor of the limited windows of opportunity to chat transnationally, and a desire not to be a nuisance, it is easy to negotiate in your own mind that now is not a good time. This situation is an example of Cao's repeated sensitivity and awareness of time zones and how they affect family values (2013).

These communication stories highlight the fluidity required by distance grandparents as to how and when they connect with their family. Spontaneity can exist, but it can just as easily be unproductive and intrusive. Acceptance of the time barrier restrictions is a basic 'given' for my distance grandparent participants.

Cao (2013:138) sums up the challenges of video calls and time zones well:

> Despite the fast advances in communication technology, time difference remains one of the few challenges in telecommunications that will likely never be truly "solved"...Therefore, understanding the role of the time difference in connecting families can be regarded as both a timeless and a timely thesis [...]

Other communication mediums

Older scholarship reports that email transcends time and space and offers a perception of intimate connectedness (Wilding 2006:138). There remained merit to this argument when video communication was in its infancy, but for my participants,

asynchronous email is a useful tool and fills a gap when phone calls or video chats are not feasible, or there is simply information to be passed on. Cao (2013:130) suggests that texting is a middle ground between synchronous and asynchronous communication as it is more often used as a chat session. I would add that email can quickly become a real-time conversation medium if you happen to be online at the same time. All communication mediums have their place in building connectedness. When Daughter No 2 schedules video calls with us, I am notified by a Google Calendar email which requires me to click "yes", "maybe" or "no". Some would think this arrangement is clinical: I see it as her making familial communication a priority.

Facebook is a more public communication medium, and although it has its place as a platform to inform, it is not a priority family communication medium for any participants. However, Facebook certainly exists in some form or other for all participant households and the grandparents enjoy viewing photos of their distance family. Ivan and Hebblethwaite concur here and describe Facebook as a complementary communication medium (2016:20). A contributing reason for my participants' low use of Facebook is the prevalence of small children amongst their distance grandchildren who are too young to be 'friends' of their grandparents. As a distance grandparent of older grandchildren, I remain cautious about becoming 'friends' with my grandchildren. It is a 'wait to be asked' scenario.

Older research participants, from the likes of Charenkova and Gevorgianiene's nursing home residents, extolled their preference for the written word (2018:498). Old fashioned letter writing did not feature in any of my interview discussions. However, I would not see that as an indication that it is a forgotten art. Birthday cards still have their place and Grandparents No 6 spoke at length about parcels they despatch by mail. Today, as I write this chapter, I was delighted to discover in my letterbox an old-fashioned, tartan emblazoned postcard from my 20-year-old granddaughter who is on a working holiday in Edinburgh.

Summary

The consensus among my participants was that information technology is a blessing in their lives, and it goes a significant way to their bridging geographic boundaries and creates ways of maintaining relationships. However there still remain problematic and frustrating barriers to communication, especially in relation to time zones. 'Lived time' is experienced through multiple temporalities which in turn, unsettle, disrupt and deeply complicate distance grandparenting and other familial relationships.

Communication routines are like the bricks of a brick wall. Bricks are tough, durable and full of purpose. Between these bricks is the mortar; a carefully calculated binding that when it is right, weathers storms and lasts forever. In the next chapters, I will discuss the mortar between the bricks of distance grandparenting. I view it as an ever-changing binding of emotions, relationships and comings and goings; the how it is for distance grandparents.

Chapter 6 – EMOTIONS

Figure 5 – All Gates airport sign

Poem: All Gates

Family come, and family go,
intense visitations when all senses are on alert,
noise, activity, emotions and general mayhem
all halted, at the airport's 'All Gates' sign,
drawn out, airily quiet, 'in-between',
private empty voids.

Contemporary forms of global capitalism encourage an internationally mobile labor force. In order for this economic system to run smoothly, one might expect that people's emotional expectations-their emotional repertoire-would have to be in sync with the demands of mobility. In other words, a globally mobile labor force would seem to require emotional expectations that enable parents and children to live apart (Coe 2014:173)

Coe's statement is a tough and somewhat big ask. Adjusting emotional expectations in the navigating of relationships is certainly part and parcel of distant grandparenting, as it is for in-country grandparenting. However, the addition of distance means that maintaining the right consistency of the emotional 'mortar' of relationships comes

with added challenges and boundaries. This chapter focusses on emotions and is followed by related chapters covering relationships and 'being there'. A variety of comments and stories will illustrate the ever-changing emotions that accompany the space and place of distance grandparenting. I relate to Pink, who states that ethnographers can produce a discourse that will have a powerful impact on their readers and audiences (2015:59). The evidence provided in this chapter and following chapters is intended to have that effect.

Emotions and social happiness, or otherwise, are increasingly debated across social sciences. Leavitt states that anthropological studies highlight that different cultures define, experience and express emotion in divergent ways (1996). Leavitt would classify my participants as having Western 'ethnic' emotions (1996). Ken Chih-Yan Sun explains that emotions and emotional vulnerability of distance grandparents offer meaningful insights into their subjectivity and the multifaceted interdependence between emotion, space and place (2017). Neil Thin, when discussing social happiness, claimed that historically anthropologists wrote of happiness in romantic ways embracing the joys of non-western cultures. He states that in recent times the discipline has focused on Western emotions, albeit more often than not, the adverse ones (2012:9). I readily admit my thesis falls into this category and my explanation is my desire to shine the spotlight on this under researched topic. In an effort though to counter this trend, I later mention positive aspects of distance grandparenting.

From the outset, I had no certainty as to how, when, where and why emotions would make themselves known during the interviews, research process and thesis writing. For example, I can, on occasions, be emotional about distance grandparenting. I wondered whether my participants would think and feel the same as I, or react differently? Would some of the grandmothers, who typically share lots of emotions with me when we are together one on one, present themselves a little differently when their husbands are present? Will I uncover grandparents who are not at all emotional about distance grandparenting, and embrace it? Would any grandfathers show a vulnerable side? Are my own emotions about distance grandparenting just one version of how one can feel? Will there be tears, including my own? Should I carry extra tissues in my handbag? Will the writing process be emotional? Will there be times

when I feel I am 'living my thesis'? I can report the answer to all these questions is "yes". Zlatko Skrbis, in his theorising of migration, emotions and belonging, stated there are two critical reasons for the inseparability of emotions from any effort to analyse transnational families. First, is the inevitable existence of family emotional ties, and second, migration is a process that disconnects families (2008:236). I too could not separate one from the other.

I argue that change is a constant companion for distance grandparents and emotions are no exception. I present my findings on emotions as a series of quotes, discussion and reflections, clustered around these concepts.

1. Absence/presence and co-presence
2. The Senses, Things, Alone Time and Rituals and Traditions
3. Grief, Loss, Acceptance and Ambiguous Loss

As a footnote it is possible that had I interviewed the grandmothers separately I may have witnessed even more emotions; however, I do not regret my choice of interview format as my grandfather participants opened up in many ways as explained in Chapter 3.

Absence and presence

Distance grandparenting is not just about the *presence* (communication and visits); it is also about the agency of the *absence* (voids, silences, memories and empty spaces) and the opaque boundaries in between. Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup and Tim Flohr Sørensen, in their discussion of *An Anthropology of Absence,* offer much to this discourse and acknowledge the conundrum of studying something which is not there. Their overall message is that "people's engagement with the world does not simply consist in deducing the meaning of people, places and things or what they represent, but also in *presencing* that which is absent in one way or another". They state that absences are important social, political and cultural phenomena that meddle with people's lives, and longing becomes a symptom of absence (2010:4 & 18). A physically present grandparent relationship with distance family can exist, but only periodically, and involves air travel expense: for some a potential obstacle. These moments of

physical presence are savoured highlights, but in between is for some, an unsettling, longitudinal absence, with ever-present ambivalent emotions.

Farrelly et al. state that the absent can have just as much effect on relations, as that which can be present. The scholars maintain that presence and absence are fluid and ambiguous in nature, all the while being a slippery relational ontology. They talk of feeling the absence of their children in the field (2014: 3,6 & 21-22). Grandmother No 1 used the exact same phrase during our interview.

> **Grandmother No 1:** I feel, probably, I'm feeling the distance more than Ken is because I've had more time with our other [local] grandchildren than Ken has. I've done bedtime with them – they have stayed with us.

> **Grandmother No 6:** It is only four months since they left - but it seems like four years.

> Past answerphone message:
> **Grandmother No 7:** Hi Helen. The kids have returned to London. I know I need to get your port-a-cot back to you, but I am not … quite … ready to pack it up yet. The house is so empty. I will be in touch soon.

> **Grandmother No 6 recounting a comment from her granddaughter:**
> Are you coming to England for my birthday?

> **Grandmother No 8** discussing Geoffrey Blainey's *Tyranny of Distance.* "There is a tyranny about it because you can't…you can't control it…you don't have the softening that a physical presence can provide so if you've got someone who is struggling, and you are watching it…it is agony for you too. You are also seeing a filtered version…You see them in crisis, but you don't see them the next day when things are better".

I remember deciding to delay cleaning the glass ranch slider door when my family returned 'home'. I wanted to retain the knee-high, toddler fingerprints for just a bit longer. When I saw the fingerprints and sensed my grandson's imaginary presence; my feelings of absence and emptiness were both heightened and lessened.

The framework of absence and presence highlights connections to meaning, mastery, ambivalence, identity, attachment and hope. The physical absence/presence of distance family can alter or upset the subjectivity of distance grandparents (Bille et al. 2010:7). Absence and presence for distance grandparents are either 'all on' or 'all off': there is rarely a 'middle of the road', in-betweenness. It can be both joy-filled while exhausting, then empty and lonely. An appreciation of the absences of distance grandparenting contributes to a deeper understanding of how distance grandparenting is and how my participants define, negotiate and understand themselves through these periods.

and ... co-presence

The Skype chime rings anticipating a temporary 'cloud' presence.

In the previous chapter I discussed communication routines. Information technology has created the digital concept of *co-presence*. Wilding talks of relationships quite literally 'in the cloud'; a 'virtual' intimacy (2006:125). This is one of the valuable 'places' of distance grandparenting as highlighted in Chapter 4. Baldassar offers a potentially encouraging finding that long distance relationships are revitalised, strengthened and reaffirmed through this virtual, proxy, physical and imagined *co-presence;* the "de-demonising" of distance (2008, 2016). Baldassar et al. go as far as suggesting that one should not assume that physical proximity is essential to sustain transnational intimacy (2007:124; 2016). Eriksen even maintains that distance is no longer a "hindrance for close contact" (2010:196). Baldassar et al., who cite Urry, state that individuals who refuse, or are incapable of being 'present' in cyberspace, can never achieve a worthwhile state of co-presence (2007:135). Clearly, the experts do not agree on how valid *co-presence* is. I would describe *co-presence* as the essential filler of an imaginary 'presence tank' that is topped up, as often as possible, to a level marked

'bearable'. There is agreement among my participants and myself that digital *co-presence* is a 'life-saver' to the well-being of distance grandparents' and helps to mitigate against the presence/absence experiences previously discussed.

The senses

> [...] people's knowledge of themselves, others and the world they inhabit, is inextricably linked to and shaped by their senses.
>
> (Sparkes 2009: 23-24)

There is no shortage of scholarship confirming the importance, relevance and positionality of senses in ethnographic studies (Field 2001; Howes & Classen 2014; Hsu 2008; Pink 2015; Stoller 1989; van Ede 2009). When I picked up Pink's 2015 publication *Doing Sensory Ethnography* with its explosive, bright pink cover, I was drawn in, and my mind was momentarily excited as to how an ordinary textbook might awaken my senses. Sensuous engagements are strongly linked to absence and presence, as previously discussed (Bille et al. 2010:13). Lars Frers blends the previous topic of absence with the senses and cites Merleau-Ponty when confirming "silence is not nothing". Frers maintains that absence is felt the most by those with the deepest ingrained attachment to that which is missing. Absence goes as far as invading the flesh displaying hurt, pain, fear and wonder. When an absence is felt, Frers maintains it has to be filled with that person's emotions to help bridge the emptiness that jeopardizes their expectations and norms (2013: 431, 435 & 438).

The West most values the senses of sight and hearing (Howes & Classen 2014:3), however, this is not the case in all cultures. When the senses of sight and hearing, via the use of information technology, are somewhat 'satisfied' for distance grandparents, the sense of touch, and the yearn for even the briefest of cuddles, remains starved. Tiffany Field describes it as a "hunger" and highlights its healing qualities and the importance of touch for the elderly; my participants (2001:16 & 30). This goes against traditional scholarship that maintains that religious practices from the likes of Great Britain, (where many of my participants originate), and the United States, with their puritanical, Protestant backgrounds, are not contact societies (2001:23-24). So even

within the West, one cannot generalize about the senses. Like emotions, the senses are complex and unpredictable and closely linked. The emotions creep up on you prompted by sensory experiences when you least expect it, as my next story shows.

Field describes touch as the mother of all senses (2001:76). Field reminded me of a touch sensation experience that jolted my awareness of the senses and absence, and how they related to distance grandparenting. A young Mum neighbour called out to me as I was walking past her house inviting me inside to have a cuddle with her new-born; her second child. Surrounded by toddler activity, toys, laundry and baby paraphernalia, I found a gap on the couch and cradled the adorable six-week-old. From nowhere, tears poured down my cheeks and I was somewhat embarrassed. I had to reassure my hostess and the toddler that nothing was wrong. I quickly realized it had been several months since I had visited my small grandchildren in America. When I cradled my neighbour's baby, the vacuum of my sense of touch, was being momentarily 'topped up' and the experience was overwhelming. This story reveals an example of my hunger for the real and evident sense of touch and the presence of the absence, as a sensual trace: "a void filled and physically felt" with my own emotions (Edensor cited in Farrelly et al. 2014:21). Additionally, it also shows where presence and absence meet: the presence of my neighbour's baby and the absence of my toddler grandsons.

Pink admits that sensory ethnography research comes with a form of the anxiety of optimism and uncertainty (2015:48). I could relate to that. I realized my ability to remain 'senses-aware' during the interviews would be crucial; reading between the lines, observing the conversational body language and nuances, and having the perception and courage, when the opportunities arose, to 'go deeper' (van Ede 2009). Elisabeth Hsu maintains senses have an ambiguous status: they are the mediators between meaning and materiality. They straddle the "interface between body and mind, and between the 'subjective' and 'objective' realities of an individual"; the bearers of emotion. (2008:433). Below are some of my participants', and my own, senses-filled thoughts and experiences that support these theorists. These situations offer a further example of the breadth of the geography of space, place and landscape and also relate back to the discourse of absence and presence. I originally thought I

would group them according to each sense type; however, it soon became evident that an experience that focused on one particular sense inevitably overlapped with at least one other. Pink cites Rodaway who explains my conundrum: "Everyday experience is multi-sensual, though one or more sense may be dominant in a given situation" (2015:14).

> **Grandmother No 8:** ...I think we miss out, because those two little ones [in London] who we do regularly have Facetime with and that has been an absolute godsend because we see ... you know we see them physically, although we can't touch them, at least we see them and they see us so we are not losing contact but we don't have the physical ... being able to play with them...Um, ... a week or two, maybe a fortnight's dose [visit] annually is probably not enough ... from my point of view.

At one stage Grandparents No 3 lived under the flight path close to Auckland Airport. The grandmother recounted: "I only had to hear the aeroplane coming over [when their son was expected} and I knew it was him – we've got to go – he'll take an hour to get through."

> **Grandmother No 8:** One of the things I love about Georgia and Rose being in England is we hear them speaking and they have got these beautiful accents and you can't believe they're a product of us.

> **Grandmother No 1:** I hope she will remember my voice.

Visual contact was especially crucial to Grandmother No 5. "I like to have quite a bit of facial contact so that she can start to recognize us because I have been thinking too, if we are going back there in August to babysit and she doesn't know us very well that could be a really tough assignment and I do not want a tough assignment".

Visits in either direction have our sense of smell working overtime. At the most basic level, there is adjusting to soiled nappies (diapers) and the perfume of a different brand of washing powder and fabric softener. Houses have smells, neighbourhoods have smells, and different weather has smells. When family visit, there are lingering smells; toiletries in the bathroom, the smell of perfume on bed linen before it heads

for a wash and leftover, special recipe food in the refrigerator. I have a travel-sized Johnson talcum powder in my sponge bag. I love to sprinkle some on my little grandsons as the perfume awakens memories for me of bathing my own children when they were infants. For me, it is a scent of love and caring. This example demonstrates how stimulated senses connect the experience of parenting with the experience of grandparenting. Nostalgia, imagination and memory are all activated in the sensory moment of the present. In no time, after a visit the inevitable clean up occurs, the visitor smells have dissipated, and normality has returned. When a stray kiddie sock appears one is automatically drawn to smell it.

Pink cites Desjarlais, who proposes that different types of sensory perception and subjectivity are affected by people's shifting orientations, changes in time and life-course events (2015:63). Howes and Classen cite Geurts, who explains that the 'sensory order' of any particular culture, or a kinship group like distance grandparents, must be understood on its own terms (2014:12). Hsu emphasizes that one cannot overestimate the social and contextual nature of sensory experiences and maintains that a particular social situation can elicit unique sensory experiences; it can be situation-specific (2008:437 & 441). Together, these scholars are communicating that sensory experiences are complex and as I found with my participants, reveal neither a consistent pattern nor a set of norms. How does one make sense (excuse the pun) of distance grandparenting sensory experiences, when some are encountered in an empty void, others in a virtual co-presence situation and some are showered upon oneself in chaotic, noisy 'in-person' connections? Once again, the evidence points to confusion and flux.

Pink offers some final sage advice that sensory ethnography, and I would add any ethnography with a strong emotional context, comes with particular ethical concerns. She says a collaborative approach is fundamental. Senses and emotions should not be studied but instead explored and identified with the support of the participants (2015:68). As mentioned in Chapter 3 this has been done as my participants were afforded an opportunity to read this thesis before its submission. They each gave their blessing to my data interpretation, storytelling and findings.

Things and photos

Miller in *The Comfort of Things* visited various homes in a North London street analysing residents' household items. "Objects store and possess, take in and breathe out the emotions with which they have been associated" (2008:30). Things are seen and are another consideration in the discussion of senses. Miller read much into the lives of his participants by analysing their 'things'. I was startled when he made a statement, based on extensive research, that people who have developed meaningful relationships to things often forge meaningful relationships with people. However, those that fail at one, often fail at the other (2008:195). This is a bold statement I am still pondering on, but it has certainly awakened my thoughts and appreciation of the potential value of things.

My home visits were brief, and I now realize I spent little time absorbing the trinkets and ornaments on display. Grandmother No 2, however, generously shared journals she has written to each of her grandchildren; her deepest thoughts and prayers were penned before they were even born. I felt very privileged to read a few pages and touch and feel these individual books. One day they will be passed to her granddaughters; a permanent reminder of their grandmother's love and devotion.

Photos are a visual reminder of distant kin; pride of place frames arranged on a coffee table or the refrigerator door covered with photos, secured with magnets acquired from here and there. Baldassar's research validated this strategy when she recounted the presence and emotional importance of material relationships during her in-home interviews; "symbols of imagined transnational family life". The discussion of these items often ended in quite an emotional "show and tell" with her interview participants (2008:251). I did not experience this to the same degree. At the outset my intention had been to raise the subject of photos however, two things happened. It soon became obvious that the displayed photos featured both in country and distance family and talking about the local family rather ate into my time. Second, photos were not as predominant in my participants' home as I imagined they would be. So in the end I chose not to raise the issue. If my interview process had included several visits as had Baldassar's, photos would most definitely have been on the agenda.

Figure 6 – Family photos on desk

I wondered if sometimes a lack of displayed photos is due to the digital age. In years gone past, when a film canister was full it was automatically taken to the chemist and expensive prints secured. When our first grandchildren were born a grandparent owned a 'brag book'; a small photo album featuring a selection of baby photos to show off. These days photos are saved on phones and iPads and perhaps photos around the home are more incidental. I never asked my participants if a grandchild featured in their mobile phone wallpaper, but it would have been an interesting question: mine do. Have our phones replaced the mantelpiece?

There was, however, one home where the photo display was dominant and evidence of the overwhelming love and devotion that the Grandparents No 6 had for their distance granddaughter. Three pride of place, large framed photos sat on the dresser in the centre of the lounge room, and a bedroom had been beautifully decorated with a *Frozen* movie theme for her recent visit. This effort included a wallpaper mural

Figures 7, 8, & 9 – Framed photos and *Frozen* them décor

imported from England, matching curtains, duvet cover and many other décor accessories. The grandparents had lovingly executed all the DIY handiwork. Their Skype conversations are conducted here so the granddaughter can continue to see 'her room' via a mirror on the opposite wall of the computer desk, that then, in turn, displays a reflection of the mural. The love these grandparents have for their granddaughter was so evident, and this beautiful bedroom felt like a shrine to her absence. We joked as we hoped she did not fall out of favour with *Frozen* as this decorating masterpiece had been a huge effort for the grandparents.

The digital age has made it relatively easy to produce photo memory books. I have compiled many over the years and airmailed them to my grandchildren as a visual

Figure 10 – Photo books

reminder of a recent visit. Glimpsing well-thumbed versions in the toy box, during later visits, warms my heart. When you cannot be there photos help bridge the gap, reinforce memories and develop familial bonds.

Rituals, traditions and materiality

Most families have rituals and traditions, so what is significant about transnational family rituals and how do they support my argument? Katy Gardner and Ralph Grillo explain that rituals are neither static events nor a static process. "This is revealed in the changing location of rituals and in the shifting transnational division of ritual space". Rituals, they maintain, are often "detachable bundles of practices". They explain that the domestic becomes a site of ritual creativity, and loss (2002:183,188 &

187). For distance grandparents rituals have agency and can shift and change at each visitation. To discuss the materiality of rituals, is to explore people's intriguingly complex, shifting relationships with traditions that have been established (Steel & Zinn 2017). My own experience has taught me rituals are sometimes tough to create and maintain by distance, but once in place, even the tiniest of acts or traditions offer much comfort to the experience of distance grandparenting. Rituals and traditions awaken and remind the senses of connections, places and people; a valuable conduit to lessen the distance. I argue that distance grandparenting is unstable and confusing: rituals and traditions, no matter how small, resemble a closely guarded cuddly rug.

Had my grandparent participants managed to retain rituals once family had departed their shores? Had new ones been created that worked across the boundaries of distance and how did they execute them? I had expected to hear stories of special foods or favourite story books, but this was not so evident. What I had not considered, as mentioned earlier, was that six of my grandparent participants had very young overseas grandchildren. It takes time to establish family rituals and traditions and consequently there was little discussion with most of my participants on this subject: it was too 'early days'. So although my rituals findings were somewhat lacking, I believe this is an important topic and could not be overlooked. To supplement my reduced findings, I have included some of my own longitudinal experiences to assist the reader appreciate this aspect. This evidence is not about weddings or grand gatherings as Gardner and Grillo (2002) feature: I focus on the little rituals and traditions that have evolved, and still exist today.

Grandmother No 3 is a very capable cook, gardener and seamstress. When I asked if they had any food traditions she promptly replied: "As long as there is plenty of cake". Everyone likes Grandma's baking. She also regaled stories of particular plants that were purchased to recognize the birth of each grandchild and how these plants reflected the personality of each child. "Felicity's was a dainty little water lily and you know it is just like Felicity – very beautiful with everything in its place". The plants have been moved, re-potted and transported during house moves, and still have a home in their current residence. The visiting grandchildren search out 'their plant' whenever they visit. The plants are an example of materiality: the presence of the

water lily, despite the absence of Felicity. Grandmother No 3 would also sew a new set of pyjamas, or nightdress, for her distance grandchildren's visits. These items were so loved by the children they were often seen wandering down the street in their new and much-cherished night apparel.

I once transported in my suitcase a precious heirloom christening gown (first sewn for me), one of Gardner and Grillo's "detachable bundles" (2002:187). Even the box it was carried in held significance. The cardboard carton is around 60 years old and was a 'freebie', all those years back from my grandfather's funeral director business; the packaging for new coffin handles. I can report a strange feeling of embodiment being responsible for this heirloom away from the safety of New Zealand. It was hard to relax until it was returned home to my mother, the great grandmother.

Figures 11 & 12 – Christening Gown and box

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I gave fruit cake to my grandparent participants as it may have caused them to reflect on taste senses-filled experiences. There was also my own family history behind this gesture. My late Mother-in-law was famous for her fruit cakes. When she died I acquired her prized, sturdy, 'old-school' cake tin. Although I have little interest in baking, I am now known for my fruitcake. I have gingerly attempted to pass on a love of fruitcake to my American grandsons who live in a country that has little appreciation of this rather English treat. It is no exaggeration to

say that thanks to my efforts these 5- and 3-year olds have become obsessed with fruitcake. Fruitcake has evolved into both a senses-filled (sight, taste and smell) experience for my grandsons and an embedded tradition for our family. This gives me comfort as fruit cake is working for me: it is building bonds and connections and trying to off-set the unsettling nature of distance grandparenting for me.

Cooking for family and having them sit around the same table is a much-cherished luxury for most distance grandparents, at home or abroad. Grandmother No 5, in particular, commented that she missed being able to cook for family gatherings. One of the advantages of utilising self-catering Airbnb's when one travels is being able to invite family over for a meal. When there are so few opportunities to cook for distance family each and every occasion is treasured and favourite dishes produced. These types of occasions lesson anxiety and keep alive connections between transnational families.

While writing this chapter No 1 son visited. My husband and I have a habit of leaving our slippers at the bottom of the stairs when we go out, in readiness for our return. One day the men left for an outing and I was home alone and I noticed two pairs of male slippers on the stairs. This little ritual became a comforting sight of a relaxed family visit. I now wonder when the visiting slippers will next appear

Figure 13 – Slippers on stairs

'Alone time' – the most valuable gift

When distance divides families, 'alone time', or what some might call 'quality time' with one or other, is a precious and treasured commodity (Bangerter & Waldron 2014:94; Banks 2009:181 & 184; Forghani & Neustaedter 2014:84-85; Peters et al. 2006:544). Alone time in the context of my research could be one-on-one conversations, or maybe a grandparent couple connecting with just one family member (in person, or via technology). Likewise, alone time might involve outings, even simply a drive in the car, a coffee stop, a walk down the road with a grandchild, your distance child or their partner. Gone, temporarily, are the dynamics of a group situation. The grandparent or grandparents have this person, 'all to themselves'. As an example, in Auckland I often drive my teenage granddaughter here and there. We have wonderful chats in the car which we both treasure. This does not happen in the same way while visiting my overseas teenage grandchildren, as everything is generally happening as a group, plus I prefer not to drive overseas. Alone time even extends to email conversations when a grandchild becomes old enough to have his or her own email address and more importantly you are advised it, without having to gingerly ask for the address. It is not that anything that might be said is particularly private, but the dynamics are different when communication is one on one. For a moment, one is magically transported from the continuous group setting, with all its inevitable dynamics, to a cherished, albeit temporary bubble of intimacy.

Grandparents No 3, who can no longer travel, talked of the visits by their distance family to New Zealand and of their desire for alone time. When their son came with his teenage children, but not his wife, the children demanded his attention and the grandparents never had a quiet moment with him. When the son came on another visit, this time with his wife and no children, the grandparents were pleased to see the couple spend time together but once again there was little one-on-one time with their son. His visits to New Zealand additionally include catchups with so many friends. My grandparent participants would have loved just a few brief moments, here and there: to have their son all to themselves.

Grandparents No 4 had a precious, two day visit one Christmas from their young adult grandchildren; the first for many years. "I guess we learnt quite a lot about them in that time and especially the eldest, John, who is now about 24 and he was very socially inept...and I walked and walked and talked and talked and you know, he said: "I realize that education is very important, but not as important as communication" and I said "Amen" to that...We fell in love with John all over again. He was fabulous".

> **Grandmother No 5:** Sometimes I have my one-to-one chats with Nigel [son] if I can. That's one of the hardest things for me at the moment – trying to talk with Nigel.

Having distance grandchildren of varying ages, I have found that the need for touch, for me anyway, dissipates a little as the children grow older, but is replaced with this sensory and emotional desire for 'alone time' with the distance grandchildren. Sometimes, this can generate unexpected emotions for one or other. For example, a distance grandchild who progresses from being a teenager, keen to drag their visiting grandparents around fun parks, matures and is now keen on an outing with them to say the theatre. Afterwards the grandchild may realize they have 'grown up' and are beginning to develop more of an adult relationship with their grandparents from afar, and the grandparents may feel the same. This is a transitional experience for each party. In conclusion the notion that 'alone time' with both grandchildren, and children is hungrily cherished by distance grandparents is maybe not always at the forefront of the middle generation's thinking.

Loss, grief and acceptance

The emotions of loss, grief and acceptance were hard to differentiate tidily. Yes, one generally follows the other, and indeed all my participants and I are in a place of acceptance, but sometimes it is a case as one of my participants states: "two steps forward, and one step back".

> **Grandmother No 5:** I see acceptance as a grieving process. Sometimes, you take a step forward and take two back, but you are moving forward the whole time and you are improving...you're accepting that...you're understanding it. It

is a loss...we have these ideals and these expectations that our children will marry and bring up their children in this land with all the things we enjoy...It is a loss that you have to accept and move on.

This interview was my most emotional, though not my only one with tears. Each time I have reread the transcription I am taken back to the moment, and my eyes are a little watery.

Me: How is distance grandparenting for *you*?

Grandmother No 7: I don't know why, but you suddenly make me want to cry...just thinking about it. [Out of our chairs for a hug]. I just...I just feel like I am totally missing out. I have never cried about this before. I am 'it' [the *only* grandparent] and I am missing out.

Me: And the child is missing out?

Grandmother No 7: Yes yes...I can't believe how much you have made me think about it [tears from both of us, another hug and off to the next room for tissues ...wavering voice] and I guess, you know I never really...I have never really minded Maria being away overseas...until this little one had come along and then I really felt it – tug at your heart. There is another member of the family there...and just accept it and be pleased. That's the most important thing.

Hsu explains that people can communicate through simultaneously felt emotions, memories and sensations (2008:439). Likewise, Yolanda van Ede maintains that ethnography should go beyond observing and listening. One should turn one's body into a research tool (2009). My tears were certainly a heartfelt simultaneous experience. Whenever I now bump into Grandmother 7, I remember and appreciate her honesty during this meeting. She exposed her vulnerability, and I exposed mine, and I felt her pain. I could empathise with the empty space of resilience she occupies as the only grandparent of her kinship 'package', and the responsibility that she feels it carries.

The mention of 'acceptance' is a finding that is frequently stated or intimated in most research similar to my own. It comes as a result of a loss, followed by a period of

grieving and then the reluctant acceptance, to varying degrees, by distance grandparents of their transnational kinship 'package' (Ahlin 2017; Banks 2009; Sevier 2013). I would describe it as layers of loss, grief and acceptance, woven over time.

When Grandmother No 3 spoke of her distant son's early travels, before he settled permanently overseas, she intimated to her husband: "We did miss him – didn't we?" Grandfather No 3 thoughtfully replied ... "We still do". Later she commented "When Stuart leaves the tap [her tears] turns on".

> **Grandmother No 1:** So in a way, I do miss the kind of day to day things[...] It is hard to imagine Lisa growing up in London. It is such a big city.

> **Grandmother No 7:** You just have to adjust your thinking...and just accept it and be pleased...that's the most important thing.

> **Grandmother No 6:** Sadly, as much as you don't want to, you just have to accept that they are not coming back.

Interestingly, scholars' findings of how this acceptance displays itself varied in other similar research studies. When they discuss 'acceptance', their language is not nearly as favourable as my participants. Sigad & Eisikovits, more than once, talked of the grandparent role as they imagined it, being compromised; "taken away" from their participants (2013:312). Nesteruk & Marks refer to disappointed immigrant parents and a dissonant and unresolved "sorrowful familial and cultural loss" (2009:92-3). This was not the language my participants used. Baldassar et al. (2014:162), with a degree of 'down-under,' down-to-earthiness, sums up that transnational families, in general, do adjust their worlds and live together across a distance. This finding, I believe, best matches my participants' thoughts on acceptance.

This discourse of acceptance has left me, however, with two thoughts around my insiderness. Some scholars have questioned at length grandparent satisfaction (Reitzes & Mutran 2004; Thiele & Whelan 2008). It never occurred to me to ask my participants how satisfied they were with their grandparenting role, distance or otherwise as it is a question I would not ask myself. My attitude is that this is a family dynamic that is beyond my control, and the best way I can support healthy

relationships is to accept and make the most of it. That left me to ponder whether my participants may have preferred to be less upbeat about distance grandparenting during our interviews, had it not been for the fact that they knew I had a 'worse package' (more distance children and grandchildren overseas) and it may have appeared impolite to moan excessively. This is another occasion when my insiderness may have been an influential factor in my findings.

An exception to the rule

Solheim and Ballard noted that families with the same physical barriers may experience transnational loss in quite different ways (2016:354). Grandparents No 2's London distance family package was similar to that of other participants' but our conversation was poles apart from the others. This highlights that there is no 'one size fits all' response to distance grandparenting: symptomatic of modernity, individualism and globalisation.

I was taken aback and startled to hear grandparents No 2 emphatically embrace distance grandparenting and how they have adapted and thrived. I have spoken to many distance grandparents in my travels, and no one has ever given this response before. This story deserved a special inclusion.

> **Grandfather No 2**: It's quite good for Rosemary because she can stop off [enroute] in Singapore and visit family.
>
> **Grandmother No 2:** It works in very well where they are in England and where I want to be. I like distance grandparenting
>
> **Me:** Why do you like it? (likely looking a little surprised)
>
> **Grandmother No 2:** I get the freedom of enjoying my own life without feeling that I need to keep (pause)
>
> **Me:** [...] every Saturday night free?
>
> **Grandmother No 2:** yes, yes! (enthusiastically). I am free – totally free. No stress. That is what is important for me...no guilt.

Grandparents No 2 shared many interests they have taken up in recent years, due to their new-found freedom. Reflecting on my argument that distance grandparenting is

the combination of many factors, I need to share their 'back story' which has an influence of how distance grandparenting is for them. Grandmother No 2 experienced a life-threatening health scare ten years ago, and thoughts of her health have made them reassess many things in life. She concluded..."I am trying now, in my old age ... no regrets, no stress, set them free....You have one couple here, who aren't upset about anything. I had twenty years [raising children], then set them free".

Ambiguous loss

Pauline Boss is the principal theorist of the concept of Ambiguous Loss (1980, 2007, 2012 2016; Boss & Carnes 2012; Solheim & Ballard 2016). When I first came across Boss's work, I was immediately 'at home': she understood how I felt. An ambiguous loss is a loss that remains unclear. Boss first applied the theory in the 70s when she was studying families. She noticed the physically present fathers were often psychologically absent. From these observations emerged the concept of Ambiguous Loss, representing both physical absence with a psychological presence (distance grandparents) and psychological absence with a physical presence (70s fathers). Distance grandparents have not lost their distance family: they have not died. However, they have lost how they imagined their family would function. They have lost a slice of their identity and the nature of their perceived senior years. The distance family is around in spirit – but they are not physically here. Ambiguous Loss encapsulates the emotions of absence, presence, loss, grieving and acceptance and the accompanying senses filled experiences. Catherine Solheim and Jaime Ballard state the families that can maintain more consistent contact are likely to experience less ambiguous loss (2016). This theory goes a long way to explaining the hazy nature of the loss for my distance grandparent participants.

It could be argued, in this age of globalisation and transnational mobility, that in time distance grandparents, through their inevitable journey of acceptance, should just 'get over it' and accept as a norm, the permanence of the physical absence of their distance family and the accompanying ambiguous psychological presence. After twenty years in this space I will never 'get over it' or see our family situation as normal. Perhaps it will become a fully embraced, absolutely normal kinship model, in a generation or two?

Willow

This chapter finishes with a story about a family pet dog. I have included this tale as it offers a longitudinal view of distance (and in-country) grandparenting and transnational familying, extending from well prior to my knowing these participants, to the present day. In the context of distance grandparenting it encapsulates so much of what has been discussed in this chapter: absence, presence, the senses, traditions, rituals, loss, grief and acceptance.

For many people, a dog is an important family member. Twice I have stayed with Grandparents No 3 and it was during these visits I was introduced to Willow, their corgi. She was an important part of Grandparents No 3's daily routine and the devotion from them, and the dog in return, was evident. My husband and I, despite our ambivalence towards pets, took a liking to Willow. The grandparents explained to me what Willow really meant to their in-country and distance grandchildren.

Figure 14 – Willow

> **Grandfather No 3:** A couple of nights ago, when they [in-country family] came back from overseas one of the boys [grandson]…the only thing he wanted to know was, "How's Willow?"

> **Grandmother No 3:** And every dog, we've ever had, has been very important to the grandchildren. We're on the third one now with grandchildren.

We discussed, that where Grandparents No 3 have lived, their 'place', has been inconsistent for their grandchildren; however, Willow has provided an agency of

stability. Willow is another 'place'. It came as a shock, just three weeks after my research interview visit, when I received an email. "Willow died yesterday. She had a liver collapse. We are a bit distraught about her but will get ourselves together soon." Even as a non-doggie person, I felt upset.

A few weeks later I asked Grandmother No 3 how the family had reacted, and how they were coping with Willow's passing. In her email she wrote:

> The answer is that the grandchildren were very upset. Three crying children on the yacht in the Pacific. Susan [granddaughter] sent an email of sympathy [from Europe] along the lines of a death in the family – enumerating Willow's nice characteristics; Stuart [distant son] was very upset, and the local family were very supportive because they had the same thing [death of a pet] a year ago. 'Death in the Family' was the theme. Everyone was very upset that we were not going to get another dog – they should have known better, and so should we. In due course, Dog No 4, called Breezee, was acquired which has met with approval from all quarters.

Figure 15 – Breezee

Willow, and now Breezee are steadfast anchors and non-negotiable conduits of 'place' of Grandparents No 3's transnational familying.

Summary

This chapter has utilised the work of Pink and focused on the emotions and senses felt by distance grandparents: their internal thoughts, the rattling of concerns and worries. They appear and disappear in the presence, absence, voices and co-presence. Possessions, rituals and traditions are also senses-filled and can form the binding for family connections. Emotions are ambiguous, lurking around corners ready to spring, often unexpectedly, upon distance grandparents. They hang around, find any porous gaps and are sometimes difficult to shake off. Distance can have the effect of heightening some emotions and lessoning others. Some emotions are short-term while some linger for years. Just as quickly emotions can disappear 'under the radar', and new ones appear as things change, or the absence of daily encounters, and the existence of voids, offers little fuel for their continued presence. These factors all contribute to the positionality and context of the distance grandparent's situation. They can, in some ways be summed up in the line – you cannot hug an iPad.

What happens when outside factors, beyond grandparents' control, affect the nature and harmony of their kinship 'package', and geography just makes life so much more challenging to navigate? This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 – THE AMBIGUITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

In the introduction I wrote of the nature of kinship and its many new guises. Is there anything natural about being a grandparent who rarely gets to truly grandparent? Sigad and Eisikovits cite Reitzes and Mutran when they claimed, "Globalization renders the grandparent's role even more ambiguous" (2013:309). I have just talked about Ambiguous Loss and now I am talking about the ambiguity of relationships. The fact that this term appears twice in my thesis is an indicator that distance grandparenting comes with more than one interpretation; a degree of inexactness and lack of clarity.

Similarly, the concept of ambivalence within relationships finds resonance with distance grandparents. Cheryl L. Peters, Karen Hooker and Anisa M. Zvonkovic sought to understand sources of ambivalent perceptions of parent-child relationships from the perspective of older parents. They explain that in everyday language, ambivalence refers to experiencing both positive and negative feelings or understandings of a situation simultaneously (2006:539-41). Ambivalence offers a framework to study intergenerational relationships and contemporary kin issues: who experiences it, how it is experienced and why it matters (Connidis 2015; Sun 2017).

The topics I present on relationships are those that appeared in discussions with my participants and as I have observed elsewhere or experienced myself. They include gatekeepers, mothers-in-laws and non-interference. When deciding on these subtopics, I was looking for the commonality of the "who", "how" and "why" of experiences. They are all just as relevant to in-country grandparenting, however, when distance is added to the equation, some hurdles are a little more challenging to navigate.

Gatekeepers versus gate openers

When I was on the 'home straight' of this thesis Grandfather No 1 rang to alert me to a play that was currently being staged in Auckland. For decades, recently knighted playwright Roger Hall has humorously depicted older Pākehā Kiwis as they are, warts and all with tales of travel, retirement and old age. His latest two-person play, *Winding*

Up, features a retired distance grandparent couple who have never met their two young grandsons in London (2019). Their London 'gatekeeper' daughter-in-law is as bad as they come and when I attended the production I was especially conscious of the gasps from the audience when the daughter-in-law made it blatantly clear, during an international phone call, that the grandparent couple was not welcome to stay with them on an upcoming visit, and more than likely they would not even be in town. The aftermath of the trip was that they only saw their middle generation son in London and were never introduced to the boys: another audience gasp. Grandfather No 1 knows Roger Hall and in a later email he relayed: "Roger always does extensive informal research among friends before developing his scripts, so I assume the "Julia" [distance daughter-in-law] situation is based on a real case." We agreed it was very sad. Despite this I was heartened that the little talked about topic of distance grandparenting had arrived on the stage in a public arena, and this leads me to the next discussion.

The quality of the grandparent's relationship with the middle generation, especially in a distance situation, is paramount to successful distance kinship (Banks 2009; Charenkova & Gevorgianiene 2018:497; Timonen & Arber 2012:9). Maaike Jappens and Jan Van Bavel, in their discussion of parental divorce, explain that even if the usual obstacles exist like geographical distance, time zone inconveniences, expense of travel, inability or lack of desire to fly in either direction, a positive, warm relationship can still exist if all parties are on the 'same page'. However, if one or both parties of a distance middle generation couple is less than encouraging of the parent/middle generation relationship, ambivalence exists (2016:465) and this additionally affects any relationship with distance grandchildren.

From conversations with my research participants and other distance grandparents along with my personal experience, the middle generation can be divided into 'gatekeepers' and 'gate openers' (Jappen & Van Bavel 2016). Gate openers are middle generation children who are proactive with communication and relationship building, and gatekeepers are middle generation parents who are neutral, less than accommodating, mediate communication or are even destructive of communication and relationship building (Drew & Silverstein 2007:373; Peters, Hooker & Zvonkov

2006:548; Timonen & Arber 2012:9; Uhlenberg & Hammill 1998:277). Gatekeeper tendencies can be developed by a myriad of reasons including strained marriages, prior breakdowns in communication, insecurities, disagreements and/or emotional baggage. Talk of gatekeepers/gate openers had a home in my interviews.

Particularly relevant to this study is the fact that when distance grandchildren are young the distance grandparents are reliant on the middle generation, as gatekeepers, to initiate and to encourage communication (Jappen & Van Bavel 2016:454). As previously discussed, communication at this stage, for practical reasons, is not easy and takes commitment, patience, creativity and energy, frequently at times when parenting is its most exhausting. There is no budging a 2-year-old who defiantly shouts "no" when given an opportunity to chat with Nana and Grandad: one cannot take it personally. When children are a little older, they generally still need parental support and encouragement to connect. Older children and young adults have more freedom to connect but grandparents are often not their priority.

During all interviews, we talked about the grandparents' relationship with their middle generation. Most of my participants indicated their middle generation were 'gate openers' and some enthusiastically acknowledged this.

> **Grandfather No 3:** [...] one of the difficulties of grandparenting, whether it is near or far, is the attitude of the in-laws [daughter/son]. Stuart and Diane have always been good.

Grandparents No 3 can no longer travel. Later in our interview I surmised some of their thoughts.

> **Me:** So what you are saying is that the moral of the story is whether they are in Europe or New Zealand it is all about the people at the end of the day...their commitment to you and their relationship with you. So it is not all bad that they are over there [Europe] because they are [still] pro-active and caring?
> **Grandmother No 3:** Yes, and we are the same way.

Grandmother No 5: Whenever we go, she [daughter-in-law] makes us feel very welcome. She keeps saying over and over again. You are always welcome here. Don't ever feel that you are imposing because you are not.

Grandmother No 7: I have got a very, very happy family group. I am extremely fortunate, and I know that...They might not live where I would like to see them, they might not have what I want...but they have just this wonderful, happy bubble going on.

Grandmother No 8: She [distance daughter] is a 'gate opener' – definitely and she...she is the one who drives Facetime. She is very regular.

One distance grandparent couple, whose son is divorced and lives apart from his children and ex-wife, did not respond with the same enthusiasm. As explained by Sun, some left-behind parents experience ambivalence (2017:600). How distance grandparenting is for them includes a degree of heartache.

Grandmother No 4: We love our grandchildren as you know, and because we have only got the two in Auckland, here, and we know them inside out and back to front and love them to bits and obviously we love the ones in the U.K. as well but that's been tenuous because the communications have always been [initiated] on our side and they are 12,000 miles away. So, we always instigate the phone calls and it's always on their birthdays and Christmas and we send them presents and we've seen them probably four times in the U.K. They have lived there probably about 10-12 years now. In 11 years, we have been there about 4 times...So we don't really know the ins and outs of them if you like...But Isobel [oldest distance granddaughter]...but we have only got one granddaughter ...and she has been pretty good at keeping in touch actually, especially as an adult. She will send us little messages or videos of what's she's doing or the kids. Her brothers are doing...and that's really nice. At the age of 16 she spoke to us on ... I'll never forget it...she said, "Omar and Oppa you have never forgotten our birthdays...and even though things are up and down with our parents, that is special to us". We thought...well if we can't communicate at least...they know us and that we are in their lives. When Isobel gets married – at

some stage she will – I don't know, at some stage it would be fabulous to go to the wedding.

Grandfather No 4: If we're invited!

Grandmother No 4: I am sure Isobel would invite us (laughing with hesitation, knowing nothing is a given).

This story is important as evidence of my argument that in-country family contribute to how distance grandparenting is. Their New Zealand daughter, son-in-law and two grandsons are very close and supportive and also grapple with the same distance kinship ambivalence. Grandparents No 4 tolerate and accept their distance familial 'package' as it is offset to a generous degree by the pro-active love from their in-country family. Distance grandparenting for them is like a 'package deal'; one helps to counter the other.

Likewise, the story above provides an example of how distance grandparenting is constantly changing. When their rather estranged, distance grandchildren spent just two days with them one Christmas, an encouraging new connection was made, and the feelings of isolation and loneliness dissipated albeit briefly. Twelve months later when I happened to be visiting, one of these distance grandsons was in the country and due to visit the following week. Out of the blue, a few days before he was expected, he texted to say he was driving through their town enroute to his next destination and would pop in for lunch later that day. I will never forget the bevy of excited activity as lunch was prepared, various urgent tasks attended to, and my husband and I exited, so when the doorbell rang, they could give him their undivided, 'alone time' attention.

Grandparents No 6 offer another strained story. As previously mentioned, they have a very close relationship with one distance granddaughter, son and daughter-in-law. I was aware that Grandfather No 6 had other overseas children and grandchildren from his first marriage; not a topic that was often mentioned. When I gently raised the subject of "the other ones" I sensed emotions remained raw. Relationships with this middle generation were strained; elements of gatekeeping existed. The result is that their grandparent love is focussed entirely on their one distance granddaughter where

communication is easy, and the middle generation are gate openers. As described by the grandfather: "I have to be honest. I have never felt for anything, anybody, anything what I have felt for this little girl." This was one of those occasions, as mentioned in Chapter 3, when my prior knowledge of my participants presented me with a dilemma. I chose not to be quiet thus delivering me the whole story.

In a similar vein, several weeks after I had emailed another distance grandmother asking her to participate in my research, I learned why she had never responded. I knew her through a local friendship group, and was aware she was a distance grandparent, but I had neither met her family, nor knew anything of them. A few weeks after I emailed her, she holidayed overseas and once she returned, I never followed up with her. When we shared a car returning from a mutual friend's funeral, and emotions for all of us were quite raw, she was lamenting about her estranged son and I realized this was the father of her distance grandchild. She commented "I should have responded to your email Helen … but it was hard".

Disaffected family may be disaffected whether they are local or distant and thoughts of them are continuously lurking in the minds of the grandparents. Grandmother No 4 described it as "eating away" at her. As a researcher and a friend, I sense for these grandparents that the shine and sparkle has been rubbed off a significant portion of their grandparent experience and personal happiness. Linda Drew and Merril Silverstein discuss the psychological well-being of grandparents when there is a loss of contact with grandchildren as a result of divorce, or similar. A term they use is the loss of *mastery,* that is, the loss of control of one's life (2007). In all other aspects, these grandparents function well in life with a high level of control. They have, however, limited mastery of the relationships with their distance family. Circumstances have, at times, taken a significant toll on them. They have each learned to cope, endeavouring to achieve a level of emotional equilibrium.

Gatekeeper scenarios are a source of loneliness. They are places of silent, helpless sadness and trying to make sense; grandparents not necessarily wanting to discuss their family woes with 'all 'n sundry' or a researcher. As a researcher I would describe

my distance grandparent antennae as pretty perceptive, but even I did not pick up my last friend's fraught family connection.

Mothers-in-law: beware?

> [...] you did not just marry a man, you married his father and grandfather, his grandmother and, most importantly, you married his mother. The last relationship was weightier than any of the others, because a mother-in-law could make or break a marriage, sometimes even without saying anything at all. Sometimes body language was sufficient.
> (McCall Smith: 2019:3)

These are amusing well-trodden kinship beliefs from a favourite fiction writer. There is no shortage of scholarship to confirm similar ideas and my interviews supported this statement too (Arber & Timonen 2012; Banks 2009; Marriott 2016; Nesteruk & Marks 2009:85).

> **Grandmother No 8:** The nuances of being a grandmother and a grandmother-in-law. I do think it is different when it is your daughter who had had the grandchildren. You have a lot more license as a grandmother. When it is your daughter-in-law you don't have that. ...A friend of mine has a saying [about being the mother of the groom] to wear beige and say nothing...say nothing until you are asked. Talking [complaining] to the son causes a lot of problems, lots of dynamics. Who knew grandparents had to be diplomats as well?

Neither strong 'anti-mother-in-law', 'daughter versus son', nor 'maternal versus paternal' discourse was evident during my interviews even though it has strong presence in scholarship. However, I did sense a respectful overlay of caution on behalf of the three mothers-in-law participants who would try not to 'put themselves forward', all the while desiring a harmonious relationship with their distance daughters-in-laws. Interestingly, and missing from the academic discussion, are parents who only have sons. Two of my grandparent participants have three sons, and no daughters and fortunately, the distance sons, for both couples, are their best family communicators, and their distance daughters-in-law are totally supportive.

Non-interference

My grandparent participants mentioned trying not to interfere or offer unsolicited advice to their middle generation. The subject cropped repeatedly when discussing pregnancies and new-borns and will be mentioned in the next chapter. The need to 'step back' physically and emotionally can be a source of relational ambivalence. This also is an unwritten Golden Rule for grandparenting (Peters, Hooker & Zvonkovic 2006:547-8).

> **Grandmother No 8**: I've always tried to maintain...my children might beg to differ! I only give advice if they ask for it. It is hard because you can see stuff that is fairly obvious...But I think in time you gain respect and eventually they might say "what do you think?" It is music to my ears.

Even the most easy-going and content of grandparents can have their moments of despair. I remember once bumping into Grandmother No 7, who has had 20 years' experience selling new build houses and helping customers fine-tune their plans to get things 'just right'. She regaled a story from a recent overseas visit when her son-in-law, who was replacing the kitchen cabinets, made it quite clear her opinion and advice were not needed. We both laughed and shrugged our shoulders. The subject of non-interference is never far away.

When I was writing this chapter, I took time out to go to the mall and bumped into a woman I have known for many years. Her name had been on my participant list, but I had not ended up asking her and her husband for an interview. She asked after my family and I caught up on the news that there was now a second grandchild in England, and she and her husband had recently visited. When I told her about this research project, she had lots to share. My friend is a 'make-it-happen', forthright, capable woman and never short of ideas about how something should be done. She admitted to having to rein in her wisdom sharing. "I can't tell the kids how to do things. Everything is different these days. They really don't want my opinion".

Grandmother No 8 offered an insightful observation about navigating relationships and she deserves the final word.

I think there's a little bit of 'distance lends enchantment' to the view in that you know because...because you don't see them day to day. You don't see the things that drive your child crazy [about us] because in a phone call or a visit, unless you are there for months at a time, you are not going to see. And let's face it I think we can all live and sleep more comfortably if we think that's the case [preferred reality]...We tell ourselves that's the case...so much easier.

Summary

Gatekeepers, gate openers, mother-in-law caution, and policies of non-interference are examples of the complexities, ambiguity, ambivalence and inter-subjectivity of transnational family relations from my distance grandparents' perspectives. As stated by Ken Chih-Yan Sun: "parental ambivalence about family dislocation involves a multidimensional analysis" (2017:603). These concepts all had a place, here and there in my interviews and provide another glimpse of how distance grandparenting is for my participants. The nature of the relationship with the distance family is a barometer of how distance grandparenting is for distance grandparents. Distance parenthood is not guaranteed plain sailing, and I sense my participants do not take anything for granted and are conscious that constant recalibrating, reorientating and navigating of relationships from afar is a necessary essential. One of the fundamental desires of distance grandparents is to show they care, or as they all talked about ... "being there": a fundamental and all-encompassing familial desire. Chapter 8, the final chapter of this trilogy focusing on emotions, delivers the action behind the sentiments.

Chapter 8 – BEING THERE

> Caregiving comes as close as anything I have encountered to offering existential
> definition of what it means to be human.
>
> (Kleinman 2014:125)

'Being there' for family was spoken of by all participants. It is a common theme in grandparent and family scholarship and considered of paramount importance: an inner desire while simultaneously a pressure, an instinct and an obligation (Baldassar et al. 2007; Breheny, Stephens & Spilsbury 2013:176-77; Farrelly et al. 2014; Huo et al. 2018; Mansson 2016; Thiele & Whelan 2006:96). 'Being there', as a traditional grandparent in a geographically convenient setting, can take the form of a myriad of tasks and joys, including childminding, reading stories, arts and crafts, baking, or practical driving and collecting from day-care and school. A key benefit for the middle generation parents is the handy emergency backup support. 'Being there' for distance grandparents comes with a different reality due to geographical challenges complicated further by the ever-present ruminating of absence, loss, grief and senses voids as discussed.

There remains the knowledge that it could have been different, as expressed by one of Baldassar's participants when talking to an overseas family member: "But why did you have to go to live on the other side of the world?" (2007:385). As far as Ray Pahl and David J. Pevanlin are concerned, distance makes it much harder to achieve day to day familiarity with each other's lives. (2005:437). These comments refer to the fact that distance grandparents are denied the generally instinctive and heartfelt ability to care, to 'be there' for their children and grandchildren, in a hands-on, day-to-day practical way. As explained by Ghassan Hage who talked of Bourdieu's *illusio* and *habitus*, "[...] to be simply deprived of purpose and orientation is to be deprived of raisons d'être, to be deprived of being" (2014:147 & 155). Distance grandparents have the desire (*illusio*) and capacity (*habitas*), but their hands are frequently tied. Distance grandparents talk of discomfort, frustration, sadness and all address their inability to enact the role of a 'proper' grandparent (Sevier 2013:148; Sigad & Eisikovits 2013:311). My grandparent participants experienced the same. Baldassar et al. (2014:159) state that transnational

caregiving, even with the geographical separation, binds intergenerational families through reciprocity, obligation, love and trust and I found this to be true.

> **Grandmother No 2:** Just being there. The growth is at that time and you experience it with him at that time and if you are not there, he'll still grow but it's just, for my own sake….It's real…it is more real.

My data on 'being there' will cover the following topics:

1. Bumps, babies and support
2. Babysitters from afar
3. Crises: the toughest test
4. Separation and Divorce: emotions on steroids

Once again, these topics were chosen after looking for commonalities in the experiences of my participants and myself. Interviews with a different group of participants, with contrasting family dynamics and ages of children, could quite likely deliver different topics.

Bumps, babies and support

> We flew from Hong Kong to Bangkok early Friday evening. It was hot and steamy. We took the crowded airport train to the city centre station, suitcases in tow. Eventually we found our son-in-law in the crowds, tackled the metro, and later stood precariously on the road, a few feet from the curb, trying to hail a cab for the final kilometre or so.
>
> When I walked into the apartment my daughter was not there. "She must be somewhere outside I thought". In the next room, a tiny bundle lay in a bassinette hovered over by a local maid/nanny, bowing to me with her eyes lowered. I sorted of nodded in a confused manner. My only thought was: "I need to find my daughter. She would want to be here when I hold my grandson for the first time".

Baldassar et al. maintain that once children arrive for the distance family, bonds are strengthened with their parents (2007:87). However, the transition is not necessarily one of charming new-baby bliss. The impending birth of a grandchild is certainly a

much-anticipated family milestone, but when distance is part of the equation, a myriad of new emotions, uncertainties and questions appear on the horizon for the grandparents. "Should I travel over? Will my daughter/daughter-in-law want me there? Should I try and be there for the birth or travel later? How do I decide what dates to book my flights? What happens if baby arrives early…or late? Can I manage babysitting the toddler when the parents go to the hospital?" For grandparent couples, there is the question: "Should we both go or just the grandmother?" And with any new addition, there is the perennial question, "What will I be called?" Even a simple issue like this can cause a state of mild flux. Lastly, in the back of the minds of the grandparents, and unlikely to be verbalised, are questions like, "What relationship will I have with the grandchild? Will there be anything 'Kiwi' about him or her?" Six of my eight participant couples/single have distance 'under 5' grandchildren, so in recent years they have all experienced the comings and goings of one or two new-borns and toddlers and have certainly asked themselves many of these questions. I have done the same. There was a general consensus in two areas amongst my participants that travelling to visit family with a new-born was a 'wait to be asked' scenario and secondly, the middle generation do not want advice as mentioned in the previous chapter.

In 1986, when my distance grandmothers were busy mothers, Martine Segalen wrote *Historical anthropology of the family.* Segalen talks of the distinctions of roles between spouses, high levels of contact with local parents and the importance of the relationship between mothers and daughters. This was certainly the case for me during the 80s, and my mother was ten minutes away with lots of support. These observations are generalisations, of course, and I know that not all my grandmother participants actually had their mothers close by during this period. My research is too narrow to make any profound conclusions here, but when discussing "being there", I can confirm that all my grandmother participants of distance daughters, including myself have at least once, sometimes more often, flown independently to be with their daughter. Only one of my grandmothers has travelled alone to be with their distance son, and that was at a time of a crisis, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

As a side note I have offered little commentary regarding gender in this thesis as it was not a dominant factor, however, when discussing grandmother-only visits, two grandfathers commented "I would just be in the way" and "I would be useless in that situation". I did not delve further with these comments, but they would be interesting to explore on another occasion.

Grandparents No 2, with the newest distance grandchild among my participants, spoke at length about their supportive role as grandparents (and parents). Offering practical support was as far as they were concerned a non-negotiable obligation they took extremely seriously. Baldassar et al. note that parents feel particularly compelled to visit after the birth of a grandchild if they sense the mother is struggling, which was the case for this couple (2007:162).

> **Grandfather No 2:** The major concern has been that Sally hasn't been getting enough sleep and that is why Rosemary [grandmother] went [the first time]…it's imperative you keep Sally in good health.
>
> **Grandmother No 2:** That is the role of the grandparents who have had experience as being mothers and how first-time round, sort of not knowing anything. I didn't have Mr Google, while she goes to Mr Google every time. Mr Google is not God. So, I think being able to help - this is giving support. All grandparents need to. Whether their advice or support is appreciated or even taken in. It is not for us to deny them what[…](hesitating)
>
> **Grandfather No 2:** […] She has been asking for help. We were concerned about, you know, if she gets into some sort of depressive situation which would be no good for either her, or the baby, so better to invest time.

Shortly after my interview with Grandparents No 2, the grandmother flew alone to England for the second time, to support her daughter, son-in-law and grandson. To enable this trip, the grandparents cancelled a previously planned overseas pilgrimage journey, as it clashed with the England visit, a sacrifice they were happy to make. When I caught up upon her return, Grandmother No 2 recounted that she took on the 'nightshift' duty while visiting, and this enabled her daughter and son-in-law to enjoy more sleep, and transition to a new stage of parenting. The baby (8 months) was now

sleeping in his own room, and the mother had been "weaned off" the baby monitor. Grandmother No 2, who is a loving, but no-nonsense kind of woman, explained in a chuckling, caring manner that she had not travelled halfway around the world for no reason. She had a purpose and had achieved the desired results.

A couple of years ago, a distance grandmother friend related a similar story about visiting Europe at the time of the birth of her first grandchild. The new mother, her daughter, preferred baby was unrestricted by blankets during sleep time. However, after some sleepless nights, and finding the new mother in tears in the middle of the night, my friend reluctantly 'took over', swaddling the baby in a soft blanket. In no time bubs was settled, feeling securely enveloped in what some might call an old-fashioned mothering technique. Navigating these somewhat awkward situations can be lonely, and one cannot forget the son-in-law, who perhaps feels on the outer. Baldassar et al. say these sorts of visits come from a place of love, willingness and sacrifice but are not without difficulties and tensions (2007:163). Accounts from my participants support Baldassar's notion thoroughly.

Three participant grandparents had distance daughters who fell pregnant a little later in life, creating some surprises in various quarters. Two of my participant couples already had grown up, in-country grandchildren, and they thought their hands-on, grandparenting days were coming to an end. Grandparents No 6 have a blended family. They had one child together who was in his 40s when he and his partner had a child. The grandmother commented: "I never thought I would see a grandchild. I was 67 when she was born".

> **Grandmother No 1:** To me it feels like I am a bit old to be a grandparent. I ought to be a great grandparent...That is the problem with our age. They've [our friends] got rid of all the [baby] equipment or they have moved to retirement villages...We're getting old and you just hope you are around long enough to see [...] We're getting old and you just hope you are around long enough to see. We loved watching the boys [in-country grandsons] grow up and we don't know how long we will be able to watch Lisa grow up[...] I want her to have New Zealandness. I want her to feel she can come here. Whether

we'll be capable of looking after her when she is old enough to travel on her own, I don't know.

Babysitters from afar

If someone had suggested to me that there would come a day when I would spend thousands of dollars to fly halfway around the world for the primary purpose of babysitting my grandchildren, while their parents needed to travel or work, I would have flatly dismissed the thought. But that is what I have done and are currently booked to do again in a few months' time. This is evidence of the subtle, ongoing adjustments that are made by distance grandparents. Change is constant.

Sevier's discussion of Hawaii based Indian grandparents who visit their children in mainland U.S.A. demonstrates culturally diverse views of 'babysitters from afar'. There was a consensus from her participants that the possibility of needing to provide significant babysitting services during visits did not "sit well" with most of the grandparents. One grandfather commented, "I don't want to go there and just be a babysitter" (2013:148).

Babysitting distance grandchildren delivers confusing emotions of obligation. On the one hand they, and I include myself here, can feel a bit worn out and physically challenged at times constantly minding little ones, but on the other hand, you know you have yearned for this opportunity, and once you return home it will be all over again. All my grandparent participants are 'hands on' and do not expect to be waited on which indicates different cultural expectations around distance grandparenting from Sevier's participants (2013). My Kiwi grandparents who travel do so anticipating they have duties upon arrival, and readily admit any visit is "not a holiday".

Grandparents No 1 decided the wife should travel to England for a babysitting assignment. The regular London child-minder was taking a two-week holiday in July and their daughter and son-in-law wanted to save up their work vacation leave for a New Zealand visit at Christmas. The Grandmother said, "I thought I would like to do this…we can afford for me to go over". The Grandfather responded with: "So it's like a relief babysitter who happens to live 12,000 miles away". Later in the conversation she

commented: "I think my biggest fear ...when I am looking after her is, I am going to be in charge...I am to be the disciplinarian as well as the nice granny – grumpy granny - and ... gosh, I hope she likes me".

A lack of familiarity around current rules, childcare routines and discipline can be a challenge. What worked on one visit with the grandchildren may not be the default routine on the next. Child-rearing involves constant review and grandparents are understandably, not necessarily, updated on all changes. Doughnuts are a regular, purchasable, fundraising treat after some American church services. On one visit, doughnuts were a definite "no, no" from my health-conscious daughter, and her toddler was distracted away from all such sugar-laden delicacies. I dutifully followed this regime on the next visit, explaining a doughnut was not a possibility, however, World War III erupted. Little did I know that between visits the rules had changed, and doughnuts were now a regular feature of post-church attendance. It seemed to take the rest of the day for our world to regain a sense of calm.

Figure 16 – Doughnut eating

On occasions, it can also be considered an honour to be asked to babysit. I remember a conversation with Grandmother No 5, some time before the formal research, when she told me they had been asked to babysit their toddler granddaughter in America, so the parents could take a brief belated honeymoon and attend a wedding in London. There was no hesitation – their answer was "yes". The most powerful and overriding

thought was that she and her husband had been asked. They were being trusted with this little bundle, and certainly the grandparents wanted their son and daughter-in-law to have a break. The added expense, time away from work and the demands of travel for the grandparents all dissipated as the honour of being trusted was overwhelming and felt like such a blessing. I spoke to Grandparents No 5 after this visit and they shared the joys of 9 days 'alone' with their granddaughter.

The daughter and family of friends of mine earlier this year moved from New Zealand to Europe for a temporary work assignment. I never asked my grandparent friends to be my research participants due to the temporary nature of their distance grandparenting status. During the grandparent's first visit to Europe they babysat their three grandchildren while the parents had a break. They thought this would be easy as they knew their grandchildren very well. However the week proved unexpectedly challenging. The children, in just a few months, had acquired a proficient use of the local language; a language of which the grandparents had no knowledge. The children discovered they could have great fun, being as the grandmother described, "naughty", and speaking in their new language, causing no end of problems for the grandparents. My friends returned saying it was unlikely they would revisit next year. A few months down the track and a postscript to this story I can report flights are in place for another visit: a classic example of swaying emotions and adjustments are a constant.

Worry and crises: the toughest test

Parents and grandparents worry, and distance grandparents are no different, except their worry is experienced in a void that is harder to tame. There can be highs and lows, swings and roundabouts. Grandmother No 5 commented about worry from a couple of angles.

> "I guess I worry because of being a Mum...I worry about the fact that I know the boys [three brothers] really miss each other. They miss each other's company because they are very close". Later she surmised when recounting a crucial visa processing problem her distance son was experiencing: "As long as things are going well for Nigel over there, I can feel reasonably calm and happy because I

know that it is going well for them. The minute they have these sorts of issues it kind of effects on us again to. This is not good. So, you worry about it, and you're thinking about it. Gee, if they hadn't gone, they wouldn't have this problem".

Martha Doyle, Ciara O'Dwyer and Virpi Tomonen maintain that grandparents can play an important role in families undergoing stress or crisis. They can act as a stabilizing force and a catalyst for wider family cohesion (2010:588). A few of my participants and friends asked me if I would be writing about coping with a family crisis from afar. "This is important," they would say. They did not necessarily have a personal crisis experience to add to my data, but they felt it needed to be addressed.

One wintry day when a blue sky was trying to appear, I was pondering this question. I took a break from the computer and went to the garden centre. It was not yet Spring, but maybe a visit to the garden centre would sprinkle me with some spring-like feelings. While there, I bumped into a woman I only knew vaguely; we sing together in a local choir. She had some pansies in her trolley; "A little colour for a pot to brighten the day" she said. We got talking, found out a bit more about each other, and I learnt she was a distance grandmother also – twice over with family in the U.S. and England, like myself. When I shared with her my research project she also asked if I would be writing about crises. She told me that right now she was worried about her English daughter-in-law who was going through rounds of chemotherapy and radiation therapy for breast cancer. "I so want to be there for them both, but my daughter-in-law wants no one knocking at the door right now...and I can understand that. I am finding it very hard... I would really like to read your thesis. I think I would be 'at home' in it." On the way home, my thoughts were clarified: I knew I needed to address distance grandparenting (and parenting) crises. As explained by Jappens and Van Bavel, family crises have consequences for the parents and children involved, but also for the grandparents on both sides of the family (2016:465).

One of my participant couples shared a harrowing story of resilience, love and fortitude about their son in Europe, who at the time had three small children. This was many years ago, before the internet and today's ease of communication and travel.

Grandmother No 3: One day he [distant son] rang [from Europe] and said, "I've got some bad news - I have got a brain tumour".

She explained that he knew the tumour was not malignant, but it needed to be removed. With little preparation or forethought for the consequences, he was operated on and lost all his memory. He had recorded nothing beforehand. He did not know who he was. He convalesced in a hospital located in a different town some distance from his wife, who was left to manage their young family. My participant, in the end took herself off to Europe, to a country of which she could not speak the language, to be at his bedside. Armed with photo albums and old letters she helped him regain some of his memory. A few months later he flew by himself, still with little or no short-term memory, halfway around the world to visit his parents. An act they described as defying comprehension. Their son has slowly rebuilt his life, as best as he could. Talk of this son still easily initiates tears for Grandmother No 3. Grandfather No 3 maintains "[...]whether it is grandchildren or children, being available at the end of the telephone, is very important".

Similarly, I recall twice 'dropping everything' for distance family crises. The first time was a few years ago. Suddenly, it felt like everything else in life was unimportant, including the tail end of a university semester's study. I hastily submitted my assignments ahead of their deadline and missed the last two weeks of class. Daughter No 2 and family moved from Thailand to live permanently in the U.S.
After temporarily living with the in-laws they moved interstate to the city where they were settling, into an empty house they had just purchased. My daughter was eight months pregnant with a toddler, in a new city with no friends or family handy. Unexpectedly, our son-in-law had to travel abroad with his work. Back in New Zealand our neighbour's daughter had just 'delivered' at eight months. What if this happens to my daughter? The scenario was worrying and unacceptable. My husband and I were booked to visit for the 'due date' to mind the toddler, but overnight my flight reservation was brought forward, and I was on a plane, ahead of my husband. As it was, baby arrived two weeks overdue and we had just a couple of days to enjoy him. By the time I returned home two months later I was well and truly past my 'use-by' date as a distance mother and grandmother.

Separation and divorce – emotions on steroids

Although there were blended married couples in my participant group, and my single grandmother participant was also divorced, the memories of relationship trials and tribulations were well in the past for them all, and their current relationships are stable and secure. Grandparents 4 and 6 had experienced divorce within their distance children's marital relationships, however, we did not dwell on this during our interviews as it had occurred many years ago, though the ramifications are still present in strained family relations. Separation and divorce within any kinship generation can have significant ramifications for all family members (Drew & Smith 1999; Hughes 2005; Jappens & Van Bavel 2016). When geographical distance is added to the mix, and face to face contact is problematic, there is another layer of grief, loss and heartache; an extreme example of how distance grandparenting can be.

In this section I will discuss separation and divorce of the distance middle generation and its effect on distance grandparents. Here my autoethnographic self is challenged, as it is my own kinship 'package' that can shed light on contemporary separation and divorce with this generation; not once … but twice. I relate to a comment by Behar in *The Vulnerable Observer. Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* when she notes "Nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans in order to write about it". She goes on to cite Devereax, who maintains that what happens within the observer must be made known (1996:5-6). Likewise, Hall states that "ethnographers are part of their data" (2014:2176 & 2183). Finally, Ellis, when she wrote of her own life trials and tribulations, wanted her readers to experience first-hand the topic's conflicts and emotions. She wanted to provide stories to which her readers could compare their experiences (2004:19, 2009:78).

For all these reasons, and as much as I hesitate to 'airing my dirty washing', I am including, with the support of my family, stories and reflections of crises and separation/divorce. This is not easy, but at the same time, I have asked myself the question: will there ever be another occasion when an academic, who is also a distance grandparent, experience a series of events similar to mine and be willing and able to share their familial traumas? While distance grandparent scholarship remains scarce

on the ground, I feel a sense of responsibility to the discipline to document my own experiences.

Our No 2 daughter's marriage was always tenuous, and she and our son-in-law would readily admit this now. Communication in all forms was difficult, much of the time. Visits to Bangkok and later Atlanta to see them and our two toddler grandsons were strained and stressful for my husband and me. When our daughter phoned and tearfully announced her marriage was over, we were deeply shocked. Despite everything – this was unexpected. During that time, she became very sick coping with events. For the second time I dropped everything and flew over by myself for three weeks. It was an incredibly stressful, and at times a lonely visit. The state of Georgia allows a divorce to be filed 30 days from the date of separation. In New Zealand we are accustomed to a two-year compulsory wait. Watching this all unfold at a record pace was unnerving. The ongoing months were testing. It was a whirlwind of emotions, big decisions, long video calls and emails mixed in with giant adjustments and bucket loads of acceptance.

My autoethnographic thoughts on divorce do not stop with my daughter. While writing this thesis, my distance step-parenting and step-grandparenting world was unexpectedly turned upside down again, just a year after No 2 daughter's divorce. It was during this time that I truly felt I was living my thesis. Everywhere I looked and everything I thought was focused on distance family flux.

Son No 1 and his family in England rarely communicated: it worked both ways. We always connected on birthdays and Christmas, but regular back and forth emails and skype calls were not the norm; however, we made many visits to them. It was not because there was no desire to communicate; it was simply tricky and problematic. Then out of the blue we got a text from my stepson asking if we could talk at a particular time the next day. We connected and found him in the depth of despair. He is always a very steady personality, a 50-something, ever patient, brick-wall kind of man. The call was littered with upset, gut-wrenching despair and he admitted his 22-year-old marriage was likely over. He was sadly at his wits end coping with a strained relationship. He rang a couple of times more over the next fortnight, each time

explaining he had not quite been able to leave and was looking for some sort of reassurance he was doing the right thing. We did our best to be the support he craved, all the while, we did not really know what to do or say.

Around the same time, we flew to Fiji for a week's holiday. It was during that visit we received another text…"Hi both. I've left her. Can you chat or not?" My husband and I shared one half of a set of headphones we happened to have with us, and talked quietly, via WhatsApp into my phone so the neighbouring bathers could not hear. He was bereft, and so were we. My concern immediately shifted to our 17 and 20-year-old distance grandchildren, whose lives had been irreversibly turned upside down, never to return to the former status quo. I knew they would never forget this day. My heart ached for them.

Fiji is dotted with tiny isolated islands. We were at a resort surrounded by hundreds of guests and staff. My husband and I might as well have been stranded on a desert island. There was nothing we could do on the other side of the world. Later that day, across the coconut tree, palm-filled expanse of Pacific Ocean fringed lawn, a Fijian band was singing for the seafood buffet extravaganza. We 'ate in'. The next day I

Figure 17 – Fiji hotel resort

wrote… "I don't know what to do with myself. I am on holiday in paradise. I am so sad, and my eyes keep welling up with tears. I don't know what to feel or think. It should all be wonderful here, but it is not. I feel very lonely.

As I write this thesis, the latest distance family separation journey is still in its infancy. When I walk up and down the hallway at my home, I am constantly reminded that I need to somehow, sometime, replace another wedding photo in the family gallery. Our 'things' have been messed with again.

Figure 18 – Family photos on the wall

How will all this affect our relationship with both sets of distance grandchildren? Doyle et al. suggest our actions can have implications now and into the future (2010:596). These insecurities and confused responsibilities fuel a worried busyness of our brains that continuously questions what we should or should not do. Jappen and Van Bavel reported that grandparent/grandchild connections reduced after divorce of the middle generation, and that was even when they lived close by (2016). Doyle et al. maintain paternal grandparents lose more connections with their grandchildren than maternal grandparents after a middle generation divorce (2010). Will that be the case for my husband and me? At a time like this the future feels full of doubts. Our connections, we imagine, with our son-in-law and our daughter-in-law will likely take a gradual decline. We care for them. We also have connections with the respective parents-in-law, who live 'in-country', reasonably convenient to our distance family. We used to enjoy their company on visits, revelling in our common denominator grandchildren. We have known them for many years, and we sense a loss there also. Our only connection currently is photos on their Facebook page, sometimes featuring them with our grandchildren. A bitter pill to swallow. Though I take consolation that they are likely struggling privately, just like us, and Facebook is not always an accurate picture of events. Doyle et al. discuss critical role transition theory (2010:595). Similarly, Sara Arber and Virpi Timonen talk of divorce in the middle generation and

the grandparents as establishing "reconstituted families" (2012:249). We certainly feel in transition and reconstituted, and in time may become further reconstituted if our daughter and/or son acquire a new partner and maybe even more children.

I have argued that distance grandparenting is a sum of several factors, and it has been the loving support of our in-country No 1 daughter and her family that has been a constant for us through these latest troubles. Transnational familying has been made easier by their unconditional support. On another positive note, both distance situations of separation and divorce have meant a rekindling of relationships with our middle generation children, due to the release from their previous strained situations and new-found freedom. Bangerter and Waldron claim that sometimes distance relationships become closer over time via "turning points" (2014:90). My husband and I can vouch for that: our lives have taken a turn and we have 'got our children back'. Hopefully, that will spill over into our relationships with our distance grandchildren. It is hard to say: nothing is a given. We, however, have become 'co-distance grandparents'. Daughter No 2 has her small boys with her only 50% of the time, and in line with others' research, our opportunities to communicate with these grandchildren are halved (Jappens & Van Bavel 2016:453). Furthermore, we have had to accept the fact that there could come a time when she visits New Zealand ... by herself, because it is, for example, her ex-husband's turn to have the children at Christmas. In the meantime, we still wait patiently for the day that our grown-up U.K. grandchildren from the second divorce visit New Zealand for the first time.

Summary

In reviewing this chapter and reflecting on how distance grandparenting is for grandparents; sometimes, it is tough. Those of us featured here found that the periods of crisis profoundly affected our health and wellbeing and were lonely, worrisome journeys. Even the best of local friends would find it hard to comprehend how it felt, and nobody wants to hear your woes repeated too often. This topic on crises is not representative of day to day distance grandparenting. Distance grandparenting is not usually this drama-filled and overwhelming. There are plenty of frivolous, fun-filled times that are savoured, photographed and we are constantly reminded of this

when the miracles of the Facetime engine generate anniversary posts and photo collection videos.

Manning and Kunkel cite Fitness and Duffield when stating that emotions can be thought of as the currency of family relationships (2014:63). This trilogy of chapters has provided a glimpse into the myriad, or currency, of emotions, senses, savoured moments, voids, losses and relationship trials and tribulations that distance grandparents experience. Another group of distance grandparents, who all have harmonious transnational kinship relationships, may never touch on some of the topics I have raised. However, from my experience it would seems that most families have their issues. The one emotion that remains consistent though all these stories is one of gradual acceptance: an acceptance of what my distance grandparents cannot change.

Chapter 9 – THE PRACTICAL REALITIES: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

This chapter addresses the ambivalence my participants and I sometimes experience around the practicalities of distance grandparenting. These non-negotiable, ever present realities continuously evolve and as we age, take on an altered slant. Also featured are reflections on the past, and the future, helpful inclusions to paint the full picture. The features topics are:

1. Travel – we go there...or they come here?
2. Global Fitness and familiarity
3. The 'Bank of Mum and Dad'
4. Contemporary views
5. The Big Unknown
6. Physical kinlessness
7. Reminiscing and reflecting

At the end of the chapter I explore the benefits of distance grandparenting.

We go there ... or they come here?

At the time of my interviews, bookings were in place for three grandparent couples plus myself to travel, and members of three distance families were due to visit New Zealand. The opportunity to travel strengthens, revitalises and sustains families. When this occurs in either direction, grandparents temporarily transform themselves into 100 per cent, hands-on, Nanas and Grandads. Baldassar et al. summarise that "for most people, most of the time, visits are a quintessentially good experience and people greatly enjoy them" (2007:163).

Journeys in either direction are focal points on the distance grandparenting calendar and add to the discourse of a multi-sited 'place' for distance grandparents. Emanuela Sala and Loretta Baldassar talk of the performative approach of contemporary families. They view visits home as performing kin ties; "delineating and reinforcing family" (2017:387). My participants indicated there are no hard and fast patterns around how

visits are planned. Ionut Földes and Veronica Savu observed this and referred to the fluid comings and goings as both "multidirectional and asymmetrical" (2018:165). On one occasion my husband and I managed to visit all three families on the same continent. It felt like a 'gold star' distance grandparent achievement.

Baldassar et al. (2007:139-163) tidily categorise visits in either direction under two sets of criterion. The first relates to the reason for a visit, which is influenced by three variables.

1. Capacity, ability and issues of time and money
2. Obligation or a sense of duty
3. Negotiated commitments: what has been established as the historical norm' for a transnational family regarding who does, or does not visit, and how often.

Second, the nature of visits falls into five categories.

1. Routine visits: the primary motivation is to visit and be with family. I would add the possibility that the venue might not necessarily be a family home, but perhaps a convenient geographically central meeting point or a holiday together in a mutually agreeable vacation location nearby to one or other. I have, for example, holidayed with our U.K. distance family in the Netherlands, France, U.S.A. and various locations in England.
2. Crisis visits: urgent visits for a specific reason. Examples of these visits are included in this thesis. All crisis visits associated with my participants, including myself, have so far been one-directional: from New Zealand. None of my participants has needed, as yet, a family member to urgently travel 'home'.
3. Duty and ritual visits: life-cycle visits often around the likes of weddings and christenings. These have occurred with my participants and myself and are combined with the intentions of a routine visit.
4. Special purpose visits: times of transition. Visits might be for the birth of a child, the final stages of a terminal illness or reasons of homesickness.
5. Tourist visits: Family visits in conjunction with a tourist-focused holiday. The family visit on this occasion is more likely a stopover, or side-trip, in between other plans; a way to connect with family, without staying for an extended

length of time. Extended family, rather than immediate family, more often fit this category.

My participants' reasons for visiting and their types of visits fall into these categories and often there is a crossover. These categories are helpful as they highlight the flexibility required by all parties regarding why a trip is planned, where it might occur, and it is also a reminder of the many trips that can be necessary to maintain physical family connections. Distance grandparents have commented to me that by the time grandparents 'fit in' all these various visits, there is often little time, inclination or money to go anywhere else. Baldassar et al. recounted that their participants bemoaned the fact that they never have a 'proper holiday' due to their familial travel commitments (2007:164). This situation can lead to feelings of annoyance and frustration, but of course, the same grandparents admit "they wouldn't have it any other way." Counter to this; the list exposes what is being missed by those who cannot or choose not to travel.

Grandmother No 5 summed up well the resilience required around future travel plans:

> "Sometimes I think gosh this is hard. This is just hard. Oh you are right…it takes effort, and you have got to keep working at it and you know this situation will never change. It is never going to get any better or easier in terms of seeing or having time with them or communicating with them. It is probably going to get harder as time goes on as they have more children and you know… the reality of them coming to New Zealand is going to be very expensive as they will be paying full fares for all their kids to come over, and all that sort of thing. I am thinking it is going to get tough as it goes on…And there might be times when…and I have noticed that with other families, that maybe they have got three kids … and only one kid comes out with a parent".

Global fitness and familiarity

Travel is a universal conversation topic for long haul, distance grandparents. Frequent flyer programmes, favourite airlines, airline lounges, convenient routes, seating preferences, homoeopathic jet lag tablets, noise-cancelling headphones, travel

insurance and Economy versus Premium Economy versus Business Class debates litter conversations. Five of my participants (couples/single) regularly travel. Of the three who remain, one can no longer manage flying but has travelled extensively in the past, the second does not wish to, and the third has travelled much in the past, but is currently unwell, and travel plans are on hold for the moment.

Grandmother No 7 commented in a happy go lucky, confident tone, how familiar her journeying has become; same route, same routines, predictable outcomes. Familiarity was a common theme during interviews. "I am quite comfortable and familiar heading into Heathrow now...I get on the [Heathrow] Express [train], and I go into the city, and then I get a taxi...Going to London to see the family is a piece of cake [laughing]. It is easy...it is familiar...I know what I am doing".

I related to Bruner when he explains there are two ethnographies of travel. One is the performance of the destination (where our family live and the familiarity we build each time with the nooks and crannies of their neighbourhoods) and second is the "travelling unit"; me, my husband and those we meet along the way (family, new friends and neighbours we re-visit each time). When you are revisiting the same destination on a regular basis, it evolves as its own site of cultural production (2005:17).This certainly eases the burden of travelling. Visits to all our children's cities are packaged with a large dose of mundane ordinariness. We know the aisles of the local supermarkets; we are conversant with the public transport systems and we are acquainted with the local eateries. We enjoy catching up with neighbours and socializing with our children's friends. I have performed 'Mother's Help' at day-care and as soon as I walked in on a subsequent visit, the teachers and children immediately recognized me. My husband and I even became a familiar enough fixture at a church and were once approached to perform a duty during the service. They thought we were a local.

The changing need to have 'one's own space' when visiting is a concern for some distance grandparents (Sevier 2013:144). Grandmother No 8 described, with philosophical acceptance, the blow-up mattress in the lounge, surrounded by drying laundry, that was her 'space' during a solo visit to London. It would never have been

acceptable if her husband had accompanied her, but she managed. Grandfather No 8 would not have been so accommodating and likely spoken up. A transition point often occurs once a second grandchild is delivered and space in the family home is at a premium. This point was raised by Grandmother No 5 when the second distance grandchild was expected. She felt her and her husband would likely need to stay somewhere close by as the family home would be at capacity.

Airbnb has become a lifeline for distance grandparents and was mentioned by my participants, and I am a regular user myself. This platform offers ordinarily, hard to find accommodation in non-touristic suburbs and neighbourhoods. On my last visit to Atlanta, I managed to reserve an Airbnb which was literally over the back fence from Daughter No 2's apartment. Our grandsons could visit, and it became a second home. We were neighbours, and this made for an incredibly convenient winter's stay, additionally avoiding the expense of an Uber to and fro.

Figure 19 – Airbnb outlook

Grandmother No 5. Summed up well the thoughts of those participants who were still able to travel.

> We go as often as we can now, while we are able, fit enough to take these
> flights. We have funds at the moment that we can do so, and then there will
> reach a point it becomes just too hard physically, and/or financially to do so,
> and we will probably just want to do more road trips around New Zealand –
> maybe the odd trip to the Pacific Islands or Australia for a sun break … but to

actually make that huge trip to the States, the East Coast of the United States, is extremely...It's a long way to go.

Grandparents No 3's brief exchange about their choice to no longer fly is philosophical and accepting.

Me: When was the last time you went to Europe?

Grandmother No 3: 2012...and we won't go again

Me: It gets harder and harder.

Grandmother No 3: [looking to her husband] Yes. You can't cope with that.

Grandfather No 3: I can't cope with a flight like that.

Me: It's all just too hard?

Grandmother No 3: Yes.

In a similar way, Grandparent No 4 reflects on their situation. "The sad thing is that when you get old or sick you can't go...because it is too far so what happens to that relationship then? If it [relationship] is strong I guess they would come out and see you...a bit tenuous, but it just doesn't happen really. But they are there forever in our hearts and they've turned out, under the circumstances, amazingly good kids [grandchildren]. We are proud of that."

The 'Bank of Mum and Dad'

The 'Bank of Mum and Dad' is a contemporary term and has a home in Baldassar et al.'s theoretical support framework: parents offering financial support to their adult children as and when the needs arise (2007). Nowadays it is an economic force to be reckoned with as the baby boomers head to retirement, frequently with more wealth than earlier generations. Naaman Zhou reports that if Australian parents, combined, were a bank, they would be the ninth-largest home loan lender in the country – more significant than the Bank of Queensland (2019). Questions of finance are never far from the minds of distance grandparents.

The 'Bank of Mum and Dad' was only mentioned directly by one couple who admit they had naively 'lent' their distance family money and have never been repaid and additionally financed a recent visit to New Zealand. They spoke of regret that they

were not firmer regarding the loan terms and felt they had maybe been too generous, allowing for their financial situation. As the Grandfather quietly admitted, "the new carpet doesn't go down" thanks to the financial strain of the family loan. I am aware of other participants who have financially supported their middle generation, even though this was not raised at our interviews. Had the couples been interviewed separately, I may have received more comments on this topic. .

Baldassar et al. reported that when their Irish based participants felt unable to undertake further journeys to Australia they preferred to contribute to fares for their grandchildren and children to visit Ireland (2007:45). Likewise, as travel insurance becomes more expensive with aging, there can be financial sense, if funds allow, for this reverse way of handling things. Lending children money, contributing towards a house deposit or paying for their airfares are decisions that are not made lightly, or necessarily in unison, and my participants tended to remain reserved on this topic.

Contemporary views

> **Grandmother No 7:** It is interesting that you get to the stage in life and you do start thinking about how you will be remembered [laughing].

Grandmother No 7, my only single grandparent, made me think. She shared views on subjects that were not mentioned by other participants. I am including them as they perhaps represent a changing dynamic of distance grandparenting. She recalled that once when she was in London, walking down the road with her daughter who was pushing the stroller, her daughter said quietly: "A lot of the women we are passing will look at me with envy". My participant explained that career focused women, in a demanding city like London, can end up in a dilemma around having children and motherhood is not possible for many reasons. When I asked my participant whether she thought there would be a second grandchild in London, she had opinions to share. She had made it clear to her daughter, who in fairness is in her early 40s and partner in his late 40s, that having a second child should not be a priority. "Think about it carefully" she warned them. She felt that having two children would make it more difficult and expensive to visit New Zealand. However, when her daughter and son-in-

law reminded her of their past desires of adopting a Romanian orphan, Grandmother No 7 definitely wanted them to know she would always welcome another grandchild, whether they are the birth parents or not. My participant grandmother was in the meantime very happy and quite accepting of her one grandchild distance family if that was the way it was to be.

Grandmother No 7 also had strong views on the environment and protecting the planet. "So, I have a little goal for my grandson. I need him to get involved in environmental science issues and…save the world". It was a few weeks after our interview that youth climate protest marches were staged in many cities of the world. Swedish teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg grabbed headlines with her passionate cries to world leaders. A new phenomenon dubbed "flight shaming" was one of her messages: a refusal to travel on planes so as to generate a slowdown in air travel growth. Sweden has trail-blazed the movement with "flight shaming' translation of "flygskam" (Coffee 2019, news.com.au 2019). In a later conversation Grandmother No 7 said her eco-conscious, English son-in-law challenged her on this issue, questioning her flights to London. She had to admit that she would not reduce her travel: seeing her grandson was non-negotiable. This situation leaves me wondering how environmentally responsible distance grandparents will appear as this social phenomenon grows. Will we be shamed for boarding a plane to visit our family?

The big unknown

> Those of us who are ageing in a transnational context, either due to our own migration or that of others, need to organise our everyday lives in a setting that is not limited to a single nation state.
> (Horn et al. cited by Näre, Walsh & Baldassar 2017:515)

Some participants, more than others, dwelt on the unpredictability of the future. Horn's suggestion offers little consolation. Nevertheless, for all, the subject is ever-present, cloaked with a muted veil of apprehension and obscured by an upbeat demeanour. Everyone had ponderings for which answers do not exist, around money,

wellness, travel or no travel, care support - all the while knowing their family is scattered.

Grandmother No 7 spoke about the future. "It is pushing me to make other decisions...One of them is if I carry on working, it's putting a dividing line between me and the kids". She spoke of ideas of living part of the year in London; maybe house swapping. We joked (half-seriously) about the concept of her buying an apartment in London, close to her family, and converting it to an Airbnb for when she was not in residence.

Scholars offer commentary about ageing and 'left behind kin', and most discuss scenarios where the kin are elderly and less able, and the narrative is on how the middle generation support them (Földes & Savu 2018; Horn, Schweppe & Um 2013; Näre et al. 2017:521; Toyota, Yeoh & Nguyen 2007; Venter & van Wyk 2018). The reality for most of my participants is that they have not quite reached the stage of desiring caregiving support from their distance family. As mentioned earlier, none has had family travel to them, specifically for this reason. This situation highlights the lack of scholarship focusing on the 'still-able', 'babysitter from afar', crises-rescue generation of distance grandparents that appeared in my research.

(Physical) Kinlessness

Grandfather No 1 related a story of an elderly man he encountered while visiting his optometrist. The gentleman had been told to bring a 'support person'. It took some convincing before the optometrist grasped that the gentleman had no one to bring because all his family lived in Australia. This was a stark reminder of a possible future reality. 'Kinlessness', also known as 'elder orphans', is emerging as a contemporary, kinship scholarship topic (Carr 2019; Montayre, Thaggard, & Carney 2019; Verdery et al. 2018). This discourse focuses on older adults living alone with no immediate family on hand. Explanations for this phenomenon include fertility (over the decades smaller family sizes), death of a spouse, estranged families and I would add globalisation. 'Left behind kin' can, in time, become physically 'kinless'. All scholars acknowledge the 'kinless' is a hard to identify and vulnerable section of any society.

During the writing of my thesis, I received an article written by an Australian academic, who in her 70s had given up her regular work to become the live-in support for her mother, aged in the 90s. Her love and devotion to her mother was touching (Symons 2019). The article focused on the phenomenon of the elderly "sandwich" generation. I would not dare forward this article to my distance grandparents, as it is a reminder to them that if they also reach their 90s, their distance 70s children might be too old even to travel, let alone care for them.

Just as my participants had questions about the uncertainty of their future, scholars identify questions around the awareness (or lack of) by social services and social workers of this growing, potentially vulnerable 'left behind' demographic (Nesteruk & Marks 2009:92). How aware are New Zealand social services of this ageing alone population? Is there a belief that the flourishing industry of retirement villages, with attached care wings, will take care of these seniors? Baldassar et al. address these issues at length, highlighting that borders, government and state policies have a significant impact on transnational practices of care. They maintain New Zealand authorities, compared to many other nations, accept a degree of obligation to care for their older citizens (2007:208 & 219). I for one would not want to rely solely on the state.

When I socialise with my distance grandparent friends, and the subject of the 'Bank of Mum and Dad' comes up, I jokingly discourage them from being overly generous. I remind them, with a sheepish grin, that when we are old and need to get to the doctor or supermarket, it might be 'Driving Miss Daisy' that transports us. Furthermore, these services are costly. Their response is always one of reluctant agreement. I include this commentary as it contributes to my argument that distance grandparenting is uneven terrain. Absence, presence, loneliness and worry all have a home in a discourse of old age and potential kinlessness. All grandparents and senior persons think and ponder about their future, but when one or more of your children live a long way overseas you know your backup support systems are not as robust as they could be.

Earlier I wrote that none of my participants is approaching 'kinlessness' and that a crises visit to New Zealand by the distant middle generation, had never occurred. And

that correct at the time of writing. Recently, I received the sad and unexpected news that Grandfather No 6, while getting ready for a day on the golf course, had a heart attack and died at home. My husband and I were shocked and upset. Grandmother No 6 has a sister handy, but as regards her immediate family, overnight she became physically kinless. These were my only participants with no children living in New Zealand. This upset me as she is a soft, delicate person, and I could not imagine her alone. During a phone call, she told my husband: "Jack was my rock...he took care of everything". I am witnessing first-hand the theoretical notion of kinlessness become a reality. At the time of writing, her England based son has travelled home, leaving his mother's cherished granddaughter back in the U.K. A latter decision will have them all returning permanently to New Zealand in a few months' time: an unexpected change of direction for the distance family. Grandmother No 6 will no longer be a distance grandmother.

Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason's classic findings state that family responsibilities are not straightforward. They are the result of "longstanding processes of negotiation based on a combination of normative guidelines and negotiated commitments" (cited in Baldassar et al. 2007:78). The elderly do not want to become a burden or a nuisance (Mead 1972:277; Stafford 2005: 65; Venter & van Wyk 2018:8). My participants feel it is their responsibility to take care of themselves as best they can for as long as they can manage, while quietly hoping that when they really needed a family member, someone would be there for them.

> **Me:** I remember you once said that Stuart [distant son] stated there would always be money for an airfare.
> **Grandmother No 3:** Yes that's right and Denise [his wife] said the same thing and the kids here [in-country] said there is always money to go to Ireland [reverse distance grandparenting situation].

Grandfather No 5's summation is representative of my participants' upbeat, while still cautious attitudes.

> [...] there is a time when things change and certainly a time when I know we might get sick and then certainly we'd like to think they might come out and

that's when...those decisions have to be made where it is just not practical for the whole family to travel...they see it as important for one to travel...and I accept that...The key is you don't pre-empt what it is all going to look like or how it is going to be. The moment you do that you form a picture in your head, and it takes a bit to get over it. So, the more you can keep it to just every day, even keel.

Reminiscing

One's own story is embedded in the stories of others in the past and the present. (Fivish 2008:55)

Reminiscing features in the everyday social interactions of virtually all families (Cosley et al. 2012; Fivish 2008). Nearly all my participants reminisced and reflected, in particular, on how they, or their parents, had moved towns, cities and for some, countries during their lifetime. I had not anticipated how frequently reminiscing would feature in our chats. I suspect my participants were likely surprised about this also as family history was not 'on the agenda', and I did not initiate any questions in this area. Reminiscing helps past events make sense of current issues and places: "one's own life in the context of familiar history" and this could be a valid explanation of my observations (Fivish 2008:55).

For some of my participants there was a reminder or realization that distance grandparenting was nothing new within their family circle. Grandparent couple No 1 immigrated to New Zealand from England with a 10-month-old. They admit they gave little thought to how their respective parents in the home country likely felt when their family continued to grow on the other side of the world. Similarly, three grandparents were coincidentally raised in the same North Island town, a good six hours drive from Auckland, and moved north as young adults. They all commented that in those days that distance was a lifetime away and reflected on how it must have been for their own parents.

Grandfather No 6: If we go back to the family from afar, in my case I moved [north]. It was a long way in those days. When you put it in context, it is not

much different from what we are doing now [the U.K.]. In fact, it was probably harder because they couldn't afford to travel up and down the country and there was no Facetime ... They probably had a harder time then we do...Taking it a step further we never really felt that we were doing any injustice to our parents.

Grandmother No 8 reminisced on her reverse distance parent relationship. "Well, I think from my perspective when I had my children my parents were in Australia. We had distance grandparenting then. So initially, for the first three years, it was good. We saw them at least twice a year or we'd go over there. But I remember Nicole being 14 months old before Mum and Dad actually saw her, and that was a pity".

Grandmother No 7 has researched her genealogy and this has caused her to reflect even more on her family history and her current situation. "I guess working on the family tree has really made me think about the journey that a lot of my family have done and my grandfather...came to New Zealand [from England] in 1927...What they did was amazing. My grandmother was the youngest of 13. She left behind all of her brothers and sisters". Grandmother No 7 indicated, on more than one occasion, that our interview had made her think. "In fact, sitting here talking to you clarifies thinking a little bit more about what's happening out there". Reminiscing appeared to help my participants 'balance' their thoughts assisting to further cement their feelings of acceptance of their distance family situations. Marco Gemignani shares the analogy of origami to explain this. He describes his participants' reminiscing as a process of folding and unfolding that creates context and order to their thinking. The interview process prompted their ponderings, with the final result being the completed origami (2014:134).

Are there benefits to distance grandparenting?

In consideration that much of my discourse has focussed on the less encouraging aspects of how distance grandparenting is, it seems only honest and appropriate to say from my own perspective there are some positive aspects to distance grandparenting, especially if one takes the attitude that 'one door opens, and another closes'.

Grandparents No 2 are quite content about transnational familying as mentioned in Chapter 6. I observe 'a look' of some of my local in-country grandparent friends who appear tired and worn out from minding their grandchildren and seem unable to maintain a balance to this obligation. That is not a dilemma I need to navigate. I recall a local grandmother friend, who, in a particularly low, fed up moment, telling me "you're lucky your grandchildren live overseas". I must confess to enjoying a luxury as simple as not having child car seats permanently installed in my car, accompanied by the inevitable flux when they need to be removed or re-installed for whatever reason. My undergraduate degree and master's journey may not have happened if I had needed to manage regular in-country grandparent duties.

I did not directly question my participants regarding their thoughts of any benefits of distance grandparenting. However, my participants and I who are able to travel have the opportunity, subject to time and finances to 'tag on' interesting and fun side excursion. I have followed umpteen posts on Facebook of exciting travels by distance grandparents and I am known for my appealing posts and photos. Likely many of these travels would not have eventuated had it not been for the desire to visit family.

Summary

In this chapter, I have dealt with every day practical issues: visits, travel and finance. I delved into the participants' concerns around the future and broached the subject of a potential physical kinlessness. Many of these concerns would never have been 'on the table' if their distance kin lived locally. Reminscing and reflecting was valuable and contributes to the argument that the experience of distance grandparenting is the sum of several factors, including on occasions family history. The participants' responses to these topics make me wonder what the findings would be if the researcher for this project had been an 'outsider', someone younger who had been availed few opportunities to travel, and regularly yearned to have the freedom (and money) to hop on a plane. Would that researcher be able to get under the skin of the uncertainty we experience regarding our declining years? It can be hard to imagine that state of thinking, when you, for example, are in your 30s or 40s. I would like to think that my

older insider status has enabled me to penetrate my participants' generally upbeat façades, empathise, understand and tell it as it is.

Chapter 10 – CONCLUSION

The story of this project began over twenty years ago with two mismatched looking New Zealand families becoming one. Our children left our shores for a variety of reasons, marriage unions occurred, and grandchildren followed. My husband and I kept adjusting our thinking, tweaking how we familied to make our kinship 'package' work. My postgraduate university studies afforded me an opportunity to research the kinship phenomenon with which I was already personally familiar. Initial reading confirmed distance grandparenting was surprisingly common in society while 'under the radar' academically. Furthermore there is no existing New Zealand scholarship on the subject, written by a local. The lived experience of the phenomenon of left-behind kin appeared to reside anthropologically, in an expanding, emptying field site called 'home'.

Friends 'in the same boat' willingly supported my research project and became my interview participants. I knew how I thought about distance grandparenting: I wanted to know how they thought. It is my longitudinal friendships with most of my participants that provides one of my first contributions to scholarship. I arrived with knowledge that spotlighted, oftentimes hidden, dig deeper signposts.

The limited existing scholarship generally utilised the qualitative methodology of in-depth interviews, so this research method became a given. I wrestled, however, with what I should do about myself. I was a problem to me. I had been a distance grandparent for 20 years, longer than any of my participants, with more children and grandchildren overseas. The awareness of my strong insiderness led me on an investigative journey of autoethnography and an acceptance that I could not stand back from this topic. I was in too deep to be just the researcher, and the dual methodologies of in-depth interviews and autoethnography achieved equal status. It is my set of personal, insider circumstances that delivers another contribution to scholarship. To the best of my knowledge no other distance grandmother is also an anthropologist and has researched this subject. I do not take my insiderness for granted and on occasions include commentary where this status may have affected by findings.

The approach of my enquiry offers a further contribution to scholarship. I ask a simple, empathetic question which is rarely voiced: "How is distance grandparenting for you?" This led to a wide variety of discussion topics that repeatedly entwined themselves around the same handful of emerging themes: distance parenting, the relevance of in-country family, defining distance, the multi-sited 'place' of distance grandparenting, New Zealand's unique location; ethnographic present, change, continuous adjustment and loneliness. These themes receive little attention in scholarship. This thematic framework was introduced in Chapter 4, the first findings chapter. From the outset the reader begins to enter the minds and worlds of my participants, and myself.

Evidence in Chapter 5 discussed communication routines highlighting the fragility of connections and the barriers of geography and especially time zones. This is followed by a trilogy of chapters focusing on the emotions of familying. Chapter 6 raises the issues of absence, presence, co-presence, the senses, loss, acceptance and ambiguous loss: all evidence of flux, ambivalence and uncertainty. Talk of ambiguity of relationships in Chapter 7 introduces the concept of gatekeepers versus gate openers offering evidence that all distance relationships are not the same, and strained connections and estrangement are the norm for some. Also discussed were mothers-in-law and non-interference. In Chapter 8 I address the importance to my participants and myself of 'being there' and the chaotic, all the while so cute, place of distance babies, toddlers and babysitting. This is followed by one of the toughest tests for me as a researcher (and distant parent) when I shared personal family crises of middle-generation separation and divorce. Finally, Chapter 9 raises the practical issues of flying, money, health, physical kinlessness and the future: all areas of uncertainty. The benefits of distance grandparenting are not overlooked and included here.

It is my participants' voices that offer a further contribution to scholarship. New Zealand distance grandparents continuously deal with a combination of geographical and time zone factors that are more restrictive than most countries in the world. My participants and I offer voices of truly knowing about 'distance' and everything that word represents and entails in a discussion of transnational kinship. We have, as the saying goes, "done the miles".

Many of my findings are similar to those other scholars. Scholars are unified in their belief that distance is the most significant barrier to the quality of grandparent/grandchild relationships (Bangerter & Waldron 2014:89; Banks 2009:179; Cherlin & Furstenburg cited in Nesteruk & Marks 2009:92; Boccagni & Baldassar 2015:73). Individually scholars argue, for example that transnational families are being reshaped by information technology (Ahlin 2017) and their changing identity is affected by some core values (Banks 2009:187).

My research consistently focused on their 'whole package'. This consists of their own situation (health, financial, employment, desire or ability or otherwise to travel), their distance family relationships, their in-country family relationships, geographical and time zone barriers. This research approach provides another contribution to scholarship. Most scholars rarely acknowledge all these elements and I maintain they all matter. By embracing participants' 'whole package' exceptions to the rule emerge, and surprising reactions and reflections are unearthed.

My findings confirm that distance grandparenting can be complex, taxing, unsettling and challenging and comes with ambiguity and ambivalence. Constant change, adjustments and loneliness all have a home. Furthermore these are all experienced in multiple psychological and physical 'places' including empty and full homes, along with cyberspace. At the same time though, distance grandparenting can be adventurous, fun and a relief. For some participants emotions are few, and they positively embrace all aspects of distance grandparenting.

Throughout, the voices of my participants and myself are loud and clear explaining how distance grandparenting is for us. Tears, laughter, honesty and vulnerability are present and practical concerns about the future are shared. Participants display a philosophical acceptance and upbeat attitude about their version of this contemporary kinship model - they have no control over.

I readily admit my research was demographically limited to a small sample of *Pākehā* European participants. It offers little data to support any argument embracing cultural, religious or language aspects of distance grandparenting. Additionally, I had not given consideration at the outset to the ages of my participants' distance

grandchildren. Among my participants was a high percentage of distance babies and toddlers. Although these participants might have been distance parents for some time, they had not been distance grandparents for very long. Their transnational stories were valuable and emotions real, however they did not come with longitudinal 'to-ing and fro-ing'. Likewise, connections involving small children and babies can at times be described as rather 'hit 'n miss', and grandparent/grandchild relationships are still reasonably fragile. If I were to do a similar project again, I would pay more attention to each family's make up, and endeavour to secure a wider cross-section of familial 'packages'. Counter to that though, another contribution to scholarship was my opportunity, albeit by accident, to deliver focused findings regarding baby and toddler distance grandparenting; an aspect of contemporary kinship that receives little attention.

Identifying further research opportunities

The opportunities are endless, so for simplicity I will focus on the New Zealand context; however, all these suggestions could apply to any nationality, and be addressed at a more global level. In my research I compared 'like with like' by narrowing my research to New Zealand, long haul distance grandparents who happen to be Pākehā European. One could compare 'like with like', one step further, and focus on a particular family scenario, a handful of which I experienced individually. These include single distance grandparents (possibly narrowed down further to single grandmothers or single grandfathers), blended/stepfamilies, single child/middle generation distance families where the grandparents are physically 'kinless', divorce situations in the middle or grandparent generation, LGBT families, special needs/disabled families and broken/disengaged/gatekeeper daughter-in-law (or sons-in-law) situations. When my participants were given an opportunity to read my thesis draft one of the grandmothers responded with the suggestion of the research question: "How is distance parenting for you?"

Particular grandchildren age groups or those with a similar length of time as distance grandparent could be the focus. Different social/cultural/employment situations may be fruitful and include distance grandchildren for whom English is a second language,

continuously 'on the move' expats, military, NGO and missionary distance middle generation families. Alternatively the focus could be on the grandparents who all live, for example, in retirement villages and/or care facilities, or who cannot, or do not wish to travel. A left-field topic is surrogate grandparents. I have had experiences here and can vouch for the comfort they bring to both the distance middle generation family and the grandparents at home.

A further area of research could be ethnicity based. In New Zealand alone, a researcher could focus in either geographical direction, on Chinese, Korean, Indian, Tongan, Samoan, Filipino, Irish, South African and Dutch grandparents to name just a few of our many ethnic communities. The grandchildren also open up the question of their attachment, or otherwise to New Zealand; a potential exploration of transnational imaginary. Lastly, another enlightening and valuable area to explore could be why the middle generation migrated. This was not raised during my interviews but potentially, the answer could add another layer as to how distance grandparenting is for the distance grandparents. If the reason made sense to the grandparents, then their acceptance of the distance would perhaps be easier; the opposite may, of course occur. This overview of potential research directions offers much evidence that academia has only scratched the surface of understanding distance grandparenting.

In conclusion Urry, cited by Baldassar et al. (2014:156) maintains that mobility, as a by-product of contemporary living, has been heralded as a new paradigm for the social sciences. Multiple academic disciplines can contribute to, and benefit by a deeper understanding of distance grandparenting. Closer to home this is supported by Robert A. Rhoads and Katalin Szelenyi who claim universities and their students have a responsibility to expand notions of global citizenship to understand and explain how increased driving force of transnationalism is shaping contemporary lives (2011:7-8). My examination of a small number of New Zealand long haul distance grandparents, whose intergenerational family lives are underpinned by mobility, has shown that to understand how they each understand their familial role, questions need to be asked that penetrate their personal and family 'packages' exposing factors, though not hidden, are not necessarily obvious. It is only then, that the full picture is revealed thus giving clarity to the question of: "How is distance grandparenting for you?"

Coda: Viral uncertainty

> This virus is an invisible enemy that is impacting every person, every town,
> every city, every country and every business around the world.
>
> (Hallet Mobbs 2020)

I am writing this in March 2020 when my thesis is nearly ready to submit for
examination. MacGregor maintains that the difficult social issues of public health
responses deserve robust reflection and scrutiny (2020:3). I therefore include this
postscript commentary at a point in history when the world's people have gone into
forced self-isolation and domestic and international borders have closed.

Daughter No 2 works at the Atlanta based Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.
Checking back on my text messages, it was a mere two months ago that she
mentioned she might be seconded to a special taskforce to oversee an escalating virus
called COVID-19. I gave the message little consideration at the time. "What virus?" A
lot has changed since then.

In the backs of our minds we all know there will come an end (of sorts) to this
pandemic but how is it affecting my participants, especially those who have family
comings and goings at this time? In the same way participants' responses varied in my
thesis: COVID-19 and its fallout, has produced different responses also.

> **Grandmother No 7**: The kids are coming early [excitedly]. They're on a flight
> from Heathrow tonight. It's like they're escaping the country. They have
> voluntarily isolated themselves for the last week or so and brought forward
> their visit before the borders might close. I will move in with friends around the
> corner and they can have my house for two weeks to self-isolate. They're
> bringing their laptops and can work remotely. Maybe they might think it is
> pretty good here and decide to stay.

When Grandmother No 7 telephoned I was in the middle of paperwork cancelling our
upcoming U.S. family visit. We were due to leave in ten days' time: our first visit in 14
months and my reward for submitting this thesis. I was pleased for her, that in the

middle of the disturbing mire of daily bad news deluges and the continuous recalibrating of our thinking, there was a good news story. I felt sad for my husband and me. How long will it be before we can hug our grandchildren?

Grandparents No 5 were also booked to visit America soon and the wife exclaimed: "[...] all our [travel] plans [have] turned to custard – and we have yet to meet Grant [new baby grandson]. I spoke to Nigel [distance son] this morning and couldn't hold back tears – because he is also thinking that his business [gymnasium] will go under – and that makes things so very hard for them too!!!"

For sixteen precious days Grandparents No 3 and their in-country family have delighted in the presence of their oldest grandchild from Europe. Her visit was unexpectedly cut short by two weeks when it became scarily obvious she needed to return immediately. Flight options were limited and airline communications precarious. Grandmother No 3 emailed late advising her granddaughter had managed to board a flight from Auckland with ten minutes to spare. "By the end of the drama all I could do was cry". I know how much these grandparents love this grandchild. They worry about her welfare and feel so short changed

Grandmother No 2 with her gentle sense of humour emailed me: "Sure is a mess, like surround sound, [you] cannot escape the upset". However, consistent with her previous responses, she philosophically admitted she was not hard hit by the virus impact and did not have the emotional attachment to her distance family in the same way she knew I did. I admire her level-headed stance.

COVID-19 magnifies and amplifies much of the commentary and findings of my thesis, especially regarding absence, presence, the senses, grief, ambiguous loss, loneliness, worry and physical kinlessness. I continue to argue that distance grandparenting is complex, unpredictable and sits on uneven terrain, but now this terrain feels like it is shaking and moving. Heightened anxiety, increased uncertainty and a potentially, even a fatal level of risk now exists. What value is there in a discussion of 'distance' when air travel is curtailed, and international borders are closed? I begin to enter the minds of my participants who can no longer travel - I feel trapped.

> [New Zealand's] Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday that strict border
> measures would likely be in place until a vaccine was available – which has
> been estimated to be 12 to 18 months away.
> (Cheng, 31 March 2020)

Will my young grandsons and daughter be permitted to travel to New Zealand this coming Christmas as planned? Will I be able to attend to my son's American wedding next year?

> [...] as clinical psychologist and president of the Australian Psychological
> Society Ros Knight explained, geographical distance can have a big impact on
> how we're feeling, particularly in times of crisis like right now. "It's that sense
> of, 'I can't go and see them' and that sense of restrictions feels wrong," [...].
> Pupazzoni, 2 April 2020

Will the freedom for transnational families to physically visit each other become an historical luxury of the past? Will distance grandparenting be forever divided into two timelines: pre-Covid-19 and post-Covid-19? Distance grandparenting, more than ever before, is a contemporary kinship model solidly embedded in a precarious, unstable place.

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Figures – digital images

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Appendix 1 – Information Sheet (2 pages)

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Being a long-haul kiwi distance grandparent

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Who am I?
My name is Helen Ellis and I am a Master of Arts student at Massey
University Albany studying anthropology; the study of humans and human
behaviour in the past and present. My husband and I have been distance grandparents for
twenty years and travel extensively visiting our family. Three of our four children and five of
our six grandchildren (2-20yrs) are settled in the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom. Over the
years we have met other grandparents with similar journeys and when I looked into this
phenomenon I discovered very little scholarly research, and certainly nothing from a New
Zealand grandparent's perspective.

Information about my project
I wish to explore the experiences, aspirations and concerns of a sample of New Zealand
grandparents who have children and grandchildren living some distance overseas.
An important criterion for selection is the geographical location of my grandparents' overseas
family. *Any* distance between grandparents and grandchildren can be challenging, however, I
believe that when a weekend visit is never feasible, a whole new set of acceptances come into
play, and can affect the intimacy of relationships.

I invite you to join my research
My research will take the form of an interview in your own home, at a time convenient to
you; grandparent couples would be interviewed together. I would anticipate we may chat for
an hour and a half or so. My research will be all about you, and your distance grandparenting
experience; the good and the bad. There will be neither set questions nor a questionnaire. As
there is no existing New Zealand based research we will be 'breaking new ground'.

My thesis journey will be supervised by two Albany based Massey lecturers. Dr Graeme
MacRae and his wife have recently 'lost' their title as distance grandparents, as their daughter
and grandchild have returned to New Zealand. Graeme travels extensively with his research
and is very familiar with maintaining family connections from afar. Dr Amy Whitehead is
American, married to a Spaniard. Both their sets of parents are of course distance
grandparents. Amy and Jose intimately understand the reality of having family on the other
side of the world. Graeme and Amy are delighted to be part of this project and I know will
provide valuable insight.

This opportunity, could be for you, simply an interesting one-off chat to share your wisdom
and support my research project, and most certainly I will very much appreciate that.
However, I would also like to invite you on an 'informal journey'. I do not want to stop with
my Masters. I would like to keep the topic of distance grandparenting alive and kicking. I
currently have a rather lofty and scary ongoing goal to write the global distance grandparent

book, for all generations. You are very welcome to be part of this adventure. These future plans will, of course, not come under the jurisdiction of the Massey University, but will be addressed, in an appropriate manner, at the time.

Data Management

Data from recorded interviews will be used in the thesis; however, to ensure that your privacy is protected, I will use pseudonyms and alter some characteristics to avoid your being identified in the report. Following standard practice, all voice recordings and transcripts will be kept in a safe and secure place. The information may be disseminated through academic conference presentations, and academic and community publications. A copy of the final thesis will be made available to you.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study by notifying me prior to 31 August 2019
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview

Questions and contact information

If you have any further questions on the research project, please do not hesitate to contact either me or my supervisors:

Helen Ellis
0274 992 033
helen.ellis.nz@gmail.com

Dr Graeme MacRae   Dr Amy Whitehead
(09) 414 0800 ext. 43474   (09) 414 0800 ext. 43846
G.S.Macrae@massey.ac.nz   A.R.Whitehead@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 2 – Consent form – couple

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TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Being a long-haul kiwi distance grandparent: a journey of the senses

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - COUPLE

We have read and we understand the Information Sheet attached. We have had the details of the study explained to us, any questions we had have been answered to our satisfaction, and we understand that we may ask further questions at any time. We have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and we understand participation is voluntary and that we may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. We agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

2. We agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participants:

I _____hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

(The form may be scanned and emailed in advance to Helen Ellis or handed over at the interview – thank you)

Appendix 3 – Consent Form - Individual

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Being a long-haul kiwi distance grandparent: a journey of the senses

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL

I have read and I understand the Information Sheet attached. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

2. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participants:

I _____hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

(The form may be scanned and emailed in advance to Helen Ellis or
passed over at the interview –helen.ellis.nz@gmail.com)

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Appendix 4 – Participant thank you card (2 sided)

THANK YOU

Peter & Gerard O'Donoghue eating fruit cake - Christmas 2018, Atlanta, USA

Grandma Pearl Ellis's famous fruit cake recipe

Bring to the boil and simmer for 10 mins, stir until boiling.1.4kg Mixed dried fruit, 250g butter, 1 cup brown sugar, ½ cup water, ½ sherry, wine or port
Cool to room temperature and leave overnight in the fridge
Add:
1 tablespoon of Golden Syrup
5 eggs beaten a little
1¾ cups of plain flour
1 third cup of self-raising flour
½ tsp baking soda, nutmeg, ground cloves
1 large tsp mixed spice
1 tsp cinnamon
also if available 2 tsps of grated orange rind & 1 tsp of grated lemon rind
Bake at 150 for 1½ hours and then 130 for 1 hour.
(I like to place a sheet of baking paper over the cake for the first hour or so)

Peter O'Donoghue in Auckland in 2016 stuffing himself with fruit cake ! sitting in the old Laloli highchair originally bought secondhand sixty years ago for Helen.

Snapfish