

Sometimes I just need a break from all the Utah-ness



BARB GUY

Utah is a surreal place where a 46-year-old can go to the post office to mail some packages and encounter a postal clerk who asks, "Are these for your grandkids?"

When my mom was 46, I was 7. Now I'm 46 and some of my girlfriends have preschoolers. Yet at a Utah post office, I'm a grandmother.

I understand that I really am old enough to be a grandmother, but what a shock that post office moment was. I'd barely even realized I haven't had kids.

So sometimes people like me can get tired of Utah. We love Utah, we love lots of things about Utah, but we don't love it unconditionally, and sometimes we just need a break from all the Utah-ness.

Thus, when my old friend Andy in San Francisco called with an

invitation to visit, Chris and I happily agreed. The chance to visit friends in another city, a city that we love because it's nothing like home, was welcome.

The occasion was Grandparents and Special Friends Day at Andy's son Ruben's school. Ruben is our godson and his grandparents were unable to attend, so we were recruited.

I was relieved to note that the grandparents at the school were our parents' age. They were not our age - not even close. These were distinguished-looking, slightly stooped, white-haired elderly folks in tweed jackets and sensible shoes. And their children, people in their 40s like us, had little kids attending the school.

The San Francisco Friends School is a surreal place where you can encounter a third-grader sprawled in a beanbag chair reading *An Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore. It is a place where, due to the influence of the nonviolent Quakers, the children, predominantly non-Quakers, are given a fine education and instructed in peaceful ways.

It is a place where, when you watch kindergartners act out a costume play medley of nursery rhymes, each story ends the same way: friendly and peaceful.

At grandmother's behest, Little Red Riding Hood phones her father to let him know that she got there safely. Then granddaughter and grandmother make friends with the wolf and they share a meal and a happy evening together.

In these revisionist fairy tales, no one gets eaten. The grandparents ate them up, as did the assorted aunts, uncles, nannies and imported-from-Utah godparents in attendance.

I know that there are 46-year-old grandparents in California, but we didn't see them. The reason is economics. A 22-year-old can surely be the parent of a 5-year-old, but she probably isn't spending \$20,000 on tuition to send him to kindergarten.

Next year poor Andy will have two kids in the school when little Elsa follows in her brother's footsteps. I admire Andy and his wife, Ginette, for the sacrifices they're making to raise intelligent, peaceful, worldly children.

These little urban kids skateboard through the Haight district and pick flowers in the city parks while Korean grandmothers (the elderly kind) do tai-chi nearby. Inside their classic San Francisco house, they practice violin and drop fish food into the aquarium for Swimmy

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and Tiny. They are unfazed by the exotic city life around them.

Whenever Chris and I visit friends with little kids we come home grateful for the quiet but missing the laughter. Kids are great at laughter.

Elsa: "Why does my daddy call you a baboon?" Me: "He doesn't; he calls me Baboo, his sweet Baboo." Elsa, giggling and poking me: "Sweet baboon."

Now I'm home in Salt Lake City where a lot of little kids are still taught that the only truly good people are the ones they see at church on Sunday and I feel a lot of sadness about that. I appreciate the Utah folks who go out of their way to teach their children how many kinds of opinions, colors, true churches and joys there are in the world.

I've recovered from our trip to San Francisco but I haven't quite gotten over being called a grandmother and a baboon.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.