



Finding Your People

One of the loneliest parts of this experience is not the silence from your grandchildren. It is the silence from the world around you.

Not because the people in your life don't care. Most of them do. But caring about someone and understanding what they are carrying are two different things. And when the people closest to you keep saying things like I'm sure it will sort itself out, or have you tried writing them a letter, or at least you still have your other grandchildren, you stop telling them. Not because you are angry with them. Because it is exhausting to explain something to someone who doesn't have the framework to receive it. So you smile and say you are managing and you carry it alone, and the alone part gets heavier over time.

This chapter is about changing that. About finding the people who don't need it explained. Who already know. Who have sat where you are sitting and felt what you are feeling and who, when you say it, simply nod.

That kind of connection is not a luxury. When you are carrying something the world doesn't have a name for, as we talked about in Chapter Four, finding people who do have a name for it is one of the most important things you can do for yourself.

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Let me tell you how this book came to exist, because I think it is relevant here.

I started writing about estrangement because of my own experience as an estranged parent. When I went looking for help, what I found online was mostly blame. Post after post, article after article, pointing the finger at the parent, holding them responsible, telling them what they had done wrong. And I knew from my own experience, and from talking to other parents, that it was not that simple. So I started writing for the parents themselves. Not to assign fault but to help people move through it. That became my first book.

Then I built stilltheparent.com, because I could see that people needed somewhere to go between the books. A place with daily support, practical tools, resources, a community. Somewhere that treated them as capable adults who needed guidance, not judgment.

Then I realised that older parents in particular, many of them grandparents, weren't comfortable online. So I wrote the workshop book, full of exercises and prompts that didn't require a screen or a login. Something they could sit with at the kitchen table.

Then I could see the gap for fathers specifically, and for grandparents, and for in-laws, all the people on the edges of estrangement who were carrying their own version of the grief and finding almost nothing written for them. So that became another book.

And then this one. Because the grandparent gap was the largest of all. Because grandparents were everywhere in these communities, hurting quietly, and almost nothing had been written specifically for them.

I tell you all of this not to talk about myself but because I think it matters for this chapter. Finding your people sometimes means discovering that the community you need already exists. And sometimes it means realising it doesn't exist yet, and that you have more power than you think to find it, build it, or contribute to it.

You are not the only grandparent in this situation. Not by a long way. The question is where the others are, and how to find them.

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Let's start with the online world, because that is where most people look first, and because I want to be honest with you about what you will find there.

There are Facebook groups for grandparents in estrangement. Some of them are large. And yes, there is something genuinely comforting about opening a page at two in the morning and finding that someone else has already written exactly what you are feeling. That moment of not being alone in it is real and it matters.

But I want you to be careful. Because a lot of those groups, if you spend too much time in them, will not help you move forward. They will keep you stuck.

When you scroll through post after post of pain, of anger, of stories that mirror yours and confirm your worst fears about how this ends, something happens to you without you realising it. You don't feel better. You feel worse. The grief gets heavier, not lighter. The bitterness of other people becomes your bitterness. The hopelessness in the group seeps into you because you have been marinating in it for an hour without noticing.

Shared pain is not the same as shared healing. A group full of people who are all still deeply in the wound is not a community that is going to help you out of it. It is a community that is going to keep you company inside it, which feels like support but isn't always.

Use these spaces carefully. Go there when you need to feel less alone. Read enough to know you are not the only one. And then close the app and go and do something that is part of your actual life. Don't let the scrolling become the thing you do instead of living.

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What actually helps, in terms of online community, is finding spaces that are oriented toward moving forward rather than staying in the pain. Groups that are moderated well, that encourage practical support, that celebrate progress as well as holding difficulty. They exist, though they take more finding.

Stilltheparent.com is one of those spaces, and I am not going to pretend otherwise. I built it specifically to be a resource that helps people move through this, not just survive it. There are tools and prompts and community there, and it is free. But more importantly, at the back of this book you will find a screenshot of the resources page on the website, and I want you to look at it properly.

There are two sections in particular worth knowing about. The first is the professional support organisations, listed by country, for Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. These are real organisations with real people in them.

Counselling directories, support lines, groups specifically for parents and grandparents of estranged adult children. If you have been thinking about speaking to someone professionally but didn't know where to start, start there.

The second section is the healing and rebuilding activities. Free YouTube channels and websites for movement, creativity, breathing, writing, art. These are not fluffy suggestions. They are practical tools for a nervous system that has been under sustained pressure, and they work. You don't need to sign up for anything or spend any money. You just need to try one and see what it does for you.

None of this requires you to be particularly comfortable online. If you can find this book, you can find a website. And if someone in your life is more comfortable with a screen than you are, ask them to help you get there. It is worth it.

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Now let's talk about real life, because this is where the connection that actually sustains people tends to happen.

Support groups for estranged parents and grandparents do exist in some areas. Your GP is often the best starting point if you don't know what is available locally. A good GP will know what community mental health resources exist, whether there are family support groups in your area, and can refer you to a counsellor who has experience with family estrangement

specifically. Not all counsellors understand this situation well, and it is worth asking before you commit to someone whether they have worked with family estrangement before.

If you live somewhere where formal groups don't exist, there is another option that more people should consider. Start something small yourself. Even two or three people who understand what you are carrying, meeting occasionally, is more valuable than any amount of scrolling. You might find those people through your GP, through a local community centre, through a notice in a library. It does not need to be formal or organised. It just needs to be real.

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And then there are the people already in your life who could be more, if you let them.

I know you have probably been protecting people. Keeping the full weight of this away from the friends who care about you, because you don't want to be a burden, or because you tried once and they said something unhelpful, or because managing other people's discomfort around your pain takes more energy than you have right now. I understand that. It is a very common response to a grief the world doesn't know how to hold.

But think about whether there is one person in your life, just one, who you have been keeping at arm's length. Someone who has asked how you are and received the short answer when they were ready for the longer one. Someone who has been waiting, perhaps, to be trusted with more.

You don't have to tell everyone everything. But letting one person in, properly, is different from the managed version of yourself you show to the world. And most people, when they are genuinely trusted with something, rise to it. They don't always say the right thing. But they show up. And showing up is what matters.

Heleen found this, in a quiet way, through her partner's social circle. She didn't go looking for support in those evenings. But once she told the truth about her situation, as she described in Chapter Eight, the people around her adjusted. They stopped directing grandchild conversations at her. They included her without making her absence the subject. That is its own kind of community. Not a grief group. Just people who know, and who act accordingly.

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Let me say something about purpose here, because it belongs in this chapter and I don't want to skip over it.

When you find your people, something often happens alongside the feeling of being understood. You start to realise that you have something to offer them. You have lived this. You know things that someone three months into this journey needs to hear from someone two years in. You know what helped and what didn't. You know the two in the morning feeling and you know, now, that it passes. You know that the grief does not stay at its sharpest forever, even when it feels like it will.

That knowledge is not nothing. It is genuinely valuable to someone who is earlier in the experience than you are. And giving it, being the person who responds to a post at two in the morning, who shows up for someone else in the community, who shares honestly what has helped, that is not only good for them. It is good for you. It moves you from being a person in pain to being a person with something to contribute. And that shift matters more than I can say.

Some grandparents find this in the online communities. Some find it in volunteer roles, working with children in schools or libraries or community groups, giving the love for children somewhere to go. Some find it in mentoring, in sharing the skills and the experience of a long life with someone who needs it. Some find it simply in being more present in the friendships they already have.

The form it takes is less important than the fact of it. Being useful to someone, mattering to someone, contributing something real to a life other than your own, that is a human need and it does not go away at sixty or seventy. If that need is not being met right now, this chapter is asking you to think about where it could be.

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I wrote this book because the gap was there and I could see it and I had the ability to do something about it. I am an estranged parent who has worked through her own experience, built a community around it, and watched hundreds of grandparents carrying a grief that almost nobody was speaking to directly. This book is my attempt to speak to it.

But a book can only do so much. It can sit with you in the pain and name it accurately and give you something to do with it. What it cannot do is replace the warmth of an actual human being who understands. That part is yours to find.

The resources are there. The communities exist. The professional support is available, by country, at stilltheparent.com. The healing and rebuilding tools are there too, free, waiting, whenever you are ready.

You don't need a large circle. You need a few people who understand. Sometimes one person who truly gets it is worth more than twenty who are trying their best but don't.

Go and find that person. Or be that person for someone else. Both of those things will change something in you.

You picked up this book because you are a grandparent who loves specific children and has been separated from them. That love is real. That loss is real. And the life ahead of you is real too, full of people and purpose and connection, if you are willing to go looking for it.

You have done the hardest part already. You have kept going.

Now go and find your people.

They are looking for you too.