



Raising Ellie

by Chloë Ellingson

This Family Day, Margaret Claus will enjoy a much-needed day of rest. Claus has raised three generations of children. She raised six of her own, two grandchildren, and now, at the age of 75, Claus is raising her 7-year-old great-granddaughter, Ellie. Ellie has been in Margaret's care since shortly after birth, and was adopted by Margaret at the age of two.

"She tires me," says Margaret. "She's a busy girl. She's a normal kid with an old mother."

Recently, Margaret's lifestyle is nearly as active as Ellie's. Both are enrolled in full-time Mohawk language immersion programs near their home on Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. "Since she's gone to this school, she's so much more grounded," says Margaret, who has found learning Mohawk to be very challenging. "She's learning it much faster than I am."

Claus's experience bears resemblance to those of thousands of Canadians. According to Esme Fuller-Thomson, a social work professor at the University of Toronto, most grandparent caregivers in Canada are single women, and this group is disproportionately out of the workforce and of native heritage.

Fuller-Thomson notes that there has been a national trend of a 15 per cent increase in grandparents raising grandchildren in recent years. She cites mental health issues and drug abuse among parents as two major factors that have led to this phenomenon.



Top left: Margaret Claus looks out over the front deck of her home. **Top right:** Margaret cuts leather at the kitchen table as Ellie plays with chimes. Ellie's shirt reads "skén:nen kénhak," which translates as a call for peace. **Second row:** Ellie plays in the yard of the home she shares with Margaret. **Above left:** Margaret tickles Ellie on her bedroom floor. **Above right:** Ellie pretends to scratch Margaret with the claw of a bear. Within the Mohawk Nation, Margaret and Ellie are part of the Bear Clan. One's clan is passed onto them by their mother. Margaret explains that in the longhouse, people without clans sit with the Bear Clan. "The bears are the ones that adopt," she says. **Bottom:** Ellie and Margaret prepare a meal on a weekend afternoon.

