

The Full and True History of the “Gramma Clause” Dedicated to My Wonderful Grandsons

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The Gramma Clause is a fairly recent creation. It all started when my daughter and I went to build the first women’s sweat lodge in 175 years in an area that sorely needed one.

I should probably give you the backdrop of the situation that led to the birth of the Gramma Clause. My children and I are urban Natives with close ties to our home reservation. At the time, I had been working in the fields of chemical dependency, mental health, domestic violence and sexual assault with Native adolescents and adults, residential and outpatient. We always went home to see family and participate in traditional ceremonies. We lived as urban traditionals. My daughter knew my position on women’s rights related to reproductive issues and that a woman’s body should be seen as sovereign. Approximately a month and a half before this, my daughter came to me asking if she could borrow my denim dress for school. She was preparing for her senior year that summer. I remember standing at the kitchen sink, saying “sure.” She looked like she had put some serious weight on, but I didn’t say it. She became very weight-sensitive since junior high. My concern was that she would feel like she needed to go on a diet.

Fast forward to the completion of the sweat lodge. The traditional elder who had directed us in the building of the sweat and said prayers for the lodge was getting ready to leave. I remember looking for my daughter. I found her leaning back, sitting against a huge fir tree and praying. When we got in the van to leave, she was very quiet. About halfway home, she quietly said, “Mom, there’s something I need to talk with you about – but not until we get home.” Of course I was curious and bit concerned due to the quiet seriousness in her tone. We got home and went to sit in the living room. After we smudged, she looked at me with tears in her eyes and said quietly, “Mom, I’m pregnant.” She went on to tell me that she and her boyfriend since junior high had tried to figure out some way to get the money for an abortion, but they hadn’t been able to. She said they were afraid to tell his parents or me. She told the reason her boyfriend hadn’t been over lately was because he was afraid that I would insist they get married.

After a period of silence, I looked at her and asked how far along she was. She said four months. (Inside I felt so badly for them. The amount of courage it took for her to tell me. The anxiety they must have had as they searched for money, fearful of their parents’ reactions.) I asked her if an abortion was really what she wanted. Also, I described to her the differences between a first term abortion and a second term abortion. I asked her if an abortion was what she really wanted. She said no, neither of them wanted her to get one. In a pregnant silence (no pun intended), my mind and heart was fishing around inside of me on what to say next to her. Suddenly the “Gramma Clause” was given birth. I immediately felt enormous joy. I looked at her intently and said, “Aren’t you aware of the Gramma Clause?” She looked confused and said no.

As matter-of-factly as possible, I said, “The clause in a situation like this kicks in. Gramma takes on a large role in the continued health of her daughter and grandchild. It says that you do not get an abortion. You also do not have to be married to have a baby. You do need to continue with school. I will raise the baby with the understanding that you and your boyfriend are his or her parents and I am the Gramma. You may not get married because you’re both too young. Also, if your relationship continues to grow, marriage now could potentially end your relationship. None of us wants that.”

“Right now what we need to do is to go to the market and get you prenatal vitamins, an appointment with a doctor and two tiny pairs of booties to help you keep going.” I also wound up going to where her boyfriend was working, selling Christmas trees for his grandfather. I repeated the Gramma Clause to him. I told him this also made him family and that he was welcome to come over whenever he wanted, including after the birth and that this was also true for his Mom and Dad. (When he first saw me, he went white as a sheet. By the time I left he was laughing and had regained his color.)

Today, my daughter and son-in-law have been married for several years. My first grandson now is ten and has a wonderful brother who is five. I am blessed with two grandsons and a daughter and son-in-law that have a good, solid relationship.