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October 04, 2010 • Vol. 74 • No. 11

## When Grandma is Mom

By RICHARD B. STOLLEY

In This City, More Than Any Other in the U.S., Grandparents Are Raising Their Grandkids When Their Own Children Can't

From PEOPLE Magazine  
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ALBERTA FRAZIER vividly remembers the day that changed her life. Her daughter Christie was

living in a drug rehab facility with her own infant daughter. Alberta and her husband, Willie, agreed to watch the baby over a weekend, but when they returned her Sunday night, the rehab center gave them alarming news: "We haven't seen Christie since Friday." A stunned Alberta, 68, thought a moment, then said, "Well, we're going to take the baby home." Jordyn, now 7, has been there with them ever since.

After supporting Christie, 35, for years-they believe much of the money they gave her went to buy drugs-they are now using their retirement savings to raise Jordyn. Willie, 66, a former chemicals salesman with an assortment of health problems, credits the little girl with "keeping me sprightly. If she wasn't here, I'd probably just be sitting in a chair doing nothing." Jordyn's father is not involved in her life. But Alberta's first cousin Keith Nesbitt, 58, appointed himself Jordyn's godfather. "They

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**2** The Little Couple Star Jen Arnold Has Cancer



**3** Kate Sparkles in Stunning Tiara on Night Out with William



**4** Keri Russell and Husband Separate After Almost Seven Years of Marriage



**5** Christian Slater Ties the Knot! See His Wedding Photo

LAST UPDATE: Friday December 06, 2013 02:10PM EST

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go to daddy-daughter dances together," Alberta says. "She's a pretty happy child." Khristie remains a part of the family, visiting occasionally. But does Jordyn know why her mother is absent? "No," Alberta says, "and someday I'm going to have to tell her, because she sees other children with a mother and father, and she's with us."

AT THE MOMENT only her granddaughter Erisha Harris and Erisha's 3-month-old are living with Edith Reed. But this grandmother of 17 and great-grandma of 11 says, "I've had nine kids in my home at one time." Reed, 63, and her late husband, Milton, raised four children in a middle class neighborhood. He had a good job at Chrysler; she took care of disabled seniors. When Milton died, in 2004, she says, "it was like I lost a right hand." Since 2005 she has also battled leukemia. Yet she is still a hands-on matriarch to her sometimes troubled family. Says Erisha, 18: "She tells me to go to school, wakes me up when my baby's crying. She does a lot." That includes acting as a parent to many offspring who don't live with her. "She's like another mother," says grandson Davontae, 16. "My school sends my progress reports straight to her house." She also rewards them with fun. "We go bowling, whatever they want," says Reed. "This helps the kids stay out of what I call 'devilish things.'" She has lived through that: One son is in prison on a gun-possession charge. Aware of her illness, her grandkids often urge her, "Sit down, you need to rest." Her response: "If I sit down, I'm still gonna hurt. So I might as well get up and do something."

IN 1987 DELORES Dumas quit her job as a school-bus driver and dropped out of her college classes to care for her daughter Yvette's son Keith. Supporting herself on Social Security, food stamps and help from family, she would eventually take in the three other kids Yvette had with two other men, as the young woman was "in and out of incarceration and [drug rehab]," says Dumas, 62. Weeks after Yvette handed over her youngest, pleading, "Mama, take care of him so he won't go into the system," Yvette was murdered by a boyfriend. "I loved her more than life itself," Dumas says. "I thought everything would be okay if you brought them up right." But she got on with the work of raising her only child's children, from riding a bus with "three kids and a double stroller" to seeking out mentoring programs. She admits it has been hard. When Yvette was killed, Keith, 23, "became a very angry young man," says Dumas, who sent him to live with an uncle in Texas. There he "hung out with the wrong people" and had trouble with the law, but "I haven't given up on him," she says. Dominique, 18, wants to go to beauty school "like her mom." Edward, 17-whom Dumas took in after Yvette was arrested for shoplifting while Edward, in a stroller at the time, was with her—is now in 12th grade at a Jesuit boarding school in Kansas. "His dream is to be a prosecuting attorney," Dumas says. The youngest, D-Allundae, 16, also does well in school. But while she loves her grandkids, Dumas looks forward to an empty nest. She hasn't given up on getting a degree and wants to advocate for women in her situation. Already she's lobbied in Lansing for increased funding. Says Dumas: "I want my life back."

Contributors: With reporting by Kristy Erdodi.

**MORE FROM THIS ARTICLE**

A Growing Problem

The blessing ends, "Lord, we pray for this granny group." Eight women, ages 49 to 82, are gathered in the kitchen of a southeast Detroit social-services building to support one another in an endeavor none of them expected to face: raising their own grandchildren.

Across America such arrangements are on the rise. The reasons are familiar and sad: parental death, addiction, incarceration, abuse or neglect charges. But Detroit's unemployment rate of 25.5 percent—the highest of any big city—has made the situation worse. While grandparents raise kids in 5 percent of U.S. homes, here that number nears 11 percent.\* Despite the challenges, many grandparents refuse to let their children's children go to foster care. Says one: "They are our flesh and blood."

\*From a 2010 survey by The Institute of Gerontology and Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute at Wayne State University.

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