

Relationships

My Kids and Their Kids Moved Far, Far Away. How I Cope

This New Yorker must now journey to Europe to see my closest family.

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Three years ago, as casually as if he were saying “I love Harry Potter,” my nine-year-old grandson, a Brooklyn resident, announced, “We’re moving to Berlin.”

Had he reported, “My fourth-grade class is going on safari to Zimbabwe,” I couldn’t have been more blown away. Sure, his mother was born in Germany, but she’d become an American citizen and had never indicated anything less than delight with living in the United States.

But the news was true. “Anne wants our kids to know her parents and culture better,” our son Jed explained — sheepishly — when I reacted, slack-jawed, especially when he added. “We’ve been discussing it for a long time.” *Newsflash*. “But it will probably be for only one year.”

Thus, began their heavy lift of international relocation: a tricky mix of finding jobs, healthcare, applying to schools and far more. Beyond these nuts and bolts were the feelings of our grandson and his little sister to consider.

I refused to let myself consider that Jed’s move might be permanent, especially when his brother Rory revealed that he, his wife and two kids were leaving *their* city of Los Angeles, where Rory worked independently in the film industry.

He could have scooped up to, say, San Francisco or down to San Diego. Not my son. He and his wife picked *Paris* and already were on a complicated path similar to Jed’s.

I'd dealt with can't-make-this-stuff-up before. *McCall's*, when I was its editor-in-chief, was hastily reborn as an eponymous magazine for Rosie O'Donnell, making my editorial job roadkill. But my family's switcharoo felt like a far deeper shocker because this time, it was personal. Quicker than I could say "You're kidding, right?" both families were halfway to Europe.

While various friends had [panted for grandbabies](#), that fantasy had never been mine. At Jed's wedding, however, he announced that he and his bride were expecting a child. Five months later, Baby Boy Koslow arrived. I took one look at this six-pound addition to our family and in a blink, I got it: instant love. This prompted me to try to morph into the grandparent I never had.

My family had been outliers in North Dakota while my paternal grandfather lived in New York. I met him only twice and I doubt he remembered my name. His wife, the paternal grandmother for whom I am named, was long gone, but my widowed maternal grandmother lived closer, in Minnesota. I saw her more often, and while I would have loved to have known Nana as an adult, she was in no way wired for kids. Think *Driving Miss Daisy*.

When I was raising my sons, I'd been a happy but harried working mom who read manuscripts after family dinner while the boys did their homework. Now I was an empty-nest novelist with a schedule flexible enough to babysit one gratifying day every week.

As our grandchildren grew, so did our bond. I adored sharing activities with them that my schedule had made impossible with my sons — becoming regulars at a weekday story hour, for example, in the library's kids' room.

Our local grandchildren nestled into our lives like the proverbial bugs in a rug. They visited for frequent sleepovers, followed by leisurely waffle breakfasts and Manhattan museum visits. My husband and I never missed a birthday party, soccer game, ballet recital or school play. I papered my fridge with kids' poetry and artwork.

We saw less of our West Coast branch but managed a few trips every year. Family life was good.

Quelle surprise. After one year, my European transplants show no interest in leaving. This fall, my grandchildren began their third school year abroad. The Parisians live in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, the kids speak perfectly accented French and the parents find Paris to be far more family-friendly (doctors make house calls, for starters) and affordable than Los Angeles.

No one misses that city's time-sucking commutes.

In Berlin, my daughter-in-law fulfilled the dream of buying her own bakery, which is prospering. Her kids are becoming fluent in German and spend more time with her parents.

Even my nine-year-old granddaughter travels solo on the S-Bahn, the intercity train. Her brother left Brooklyn as a chess player and Greek myth expert. Now, surrounded by a wide circle of

friends, he is a soccer fanatic — playing and watching. The family's apartment is big by Brooklyn standards. Since all four kids attend bilingual schools, they and their parents have made friends from many countries.

Enough with the gushing, because I won't pretend my husband and I don't feel we've pulled the short straw, especially on holidays. Where I used to cheerfully fuss for Thanksgiving and Hanukkah, hoping to create gauzy family memories, my motivation has evaporated. Why do all that work only to be in a lonesome funk when the big day arrives?

I'm grateful for today's accessible technology, even if when we chat on WhatsApp or FaceTime I often feel as if I am interviewing my grandchildren rather than enjoying the spontaneous conversation. This re-engineered version of family life also requires deep pockets. Airfare and Airbnbs are no bargain; I've had to blind myself to sticker shock as we pop off to Europe twice a year, which I consider both wildly extravagant and not often enough.

While my husband and I are already in our mid-70s, I refuse to think of aging out of travel — or think about aging, period. I see my husband's devotion to his elderly mother, who lives nearby, and wonder, who will be there for me?

Most of us are familiar with Elizabeth Kubler Roth's perennial bestseller *On Death and Dying* and her five stages of grief. I zipped through denial, stewed in silent anger, skipped bargaining because my sons' decision wasn't mine to make, and I try to deflect depression by reminding myself of the incredible growth experience my family is having in two vibrant foreign cities.

When I ruminate on American school shootings, sky-high college tuition and graduates who aspire to become influencers, I wonder if my kids' move will later be seen as the beginning of a trend.

Will I reach Ross' fifth stage of acceptance? Stay tuned