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## TRICK OR TREAT?

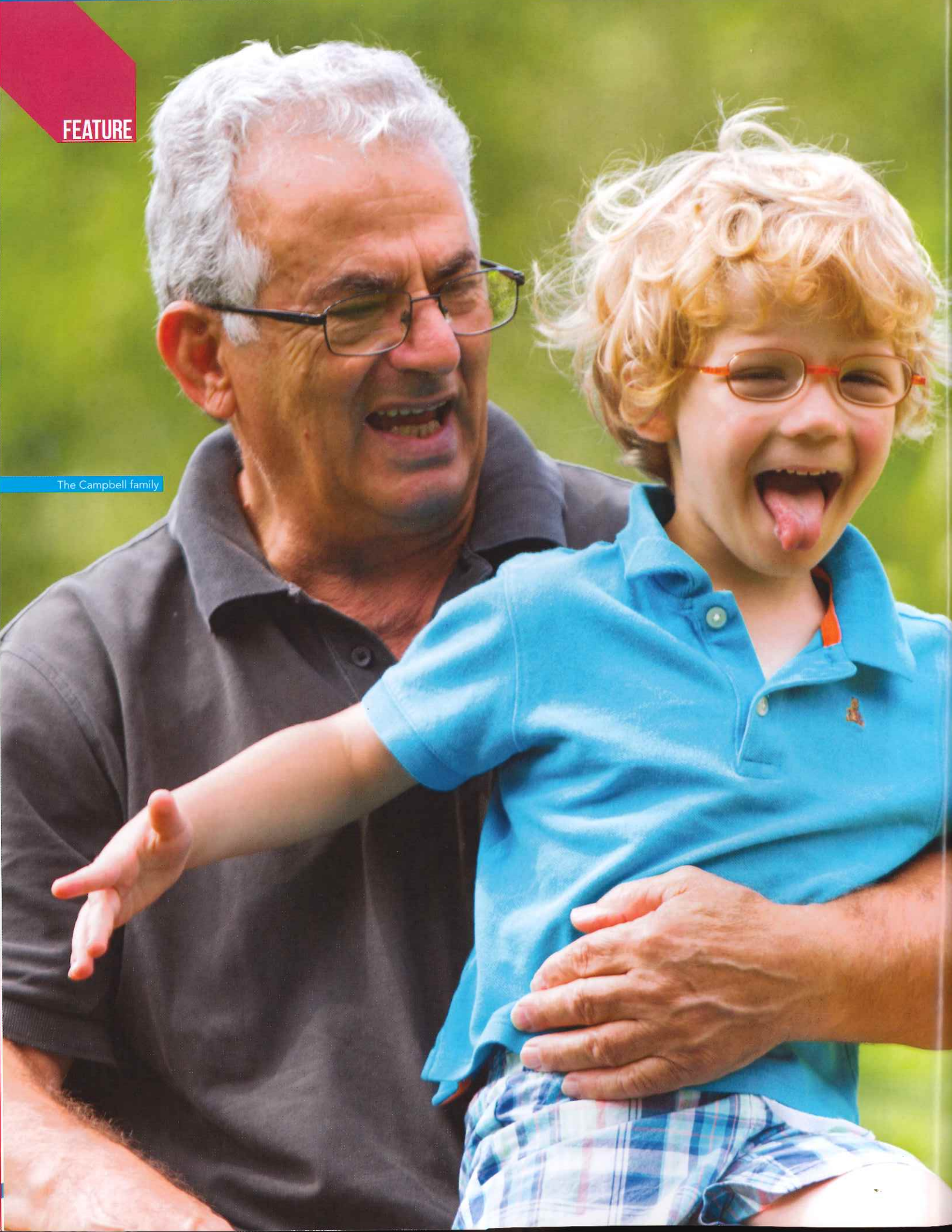
The Halloween guide

**Granny alert**

South Island School

FEATURE

The Campbell family



# FAMILY

**S**ix-year-old Oscar is sitting on the bus with his mum and little brother, Franklin, heading into Central. It's quite hot and there's not much going on out of the window. But when his mum clicks her phone onto FaceTime, suddenly he's no longer rattling along Pok Fu Lam Road but in a backyard in suburban Sydney, having a chat with his granny.

Such is modern technology. Only a generation ago, keeping in touch meant the odd, hideously expensive phone call and lots of tissue thin airmail letters. These days, Skype, FaceTime, email, WeChat et al are an intrinsic part of modern life, as expat parents try to hold together family links with those "back home".

Maintaining healthy connections with extended family is one of the biggest hurdles of expat life, according to family

councillor Justine Campbell. An expat herself, Campbell has three children, comes from Australia, and has been posted all over the world – from India to Japan and now Hong Kong. She knows exactly the kind of emotions expat parents are experiencing.

"There tends to be an ebb and flow of parental guilt about living overseas," she says. "When you move away, you lose that feeling of belonging, which can lead to anxiety and fear. Maintaining connections with family is crucial to orientating yourself in an unfamiliar environment. But it takes time and effort."

Campbell often recommends children read *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst, a heart-warming tale about overcoming separation by plucking the invisible strings of love that connect us all. The overriding message is we don't have to be physically close to be emotionally close to family.

"It was hard at first," agrees Oscar's mum, graphic designer Claire Waring. "We moved up to Hong Kong from Sydney six months ago and the boys missed home dreadfully. They were three and six years when we moved and Granny featured strongly in their lives. She lived locally and popped in regularly."

Waring has found FaceTime a godsend and the boys can chat with their grandparents regularly. "Skype doesn't work for us. The boys find it hard to sit still and concentrate on a screen. They can't figure out the phone – they find it weird not being able to see the other person – but FaceTime works really well," she says.

Unfortunately, it's not always plain sailing for all concerned, as mother-of-two Brooke Spiller has found.

"I was brought up 'on the move' so I don't think me leaving Australia 20 years

# TIES

The bond between grandparents and grandchildren can be a magical one.

**Carolynne Dear** explores how expat families can keep the relationship strong despite the physical distance.

# You don't have to be in the same country to feel close to somebody

# ”

ago to live in Hong Kong was a big surprise for my parents, who moved around often throughout my childhood. However, my mother-in-law was quite upset and I don't think she has ever really accepted our decision to live overseas," she says.

"It helps that my husband is a pilot so visits home are frequent. My mother comes up about three or four times a year and really enjoys it. She's quite independent. My mother-in-law visits maybe once every two years or so. Consequently, the children's relationship is much stronger with my mother."

According to Campbell, guilt about being overseas is not helpful.

"It is what it is," she says. "It's OK to be different, to be leading a life that was not perhaps what was expected of you. If grandparents are upset, be up front. Discuss with them the best ways

of staying in touch. Technology can be difficult to grasp. Maybe they would be more comfortable writing a letter, or putting together a book of photographs or drawings for the children. Don't be afraid to bend the rules a bit."

Meanwhile, mother-of-three Nikola Andersson has her work cut out staying in touch with family, who are spread across four continents.

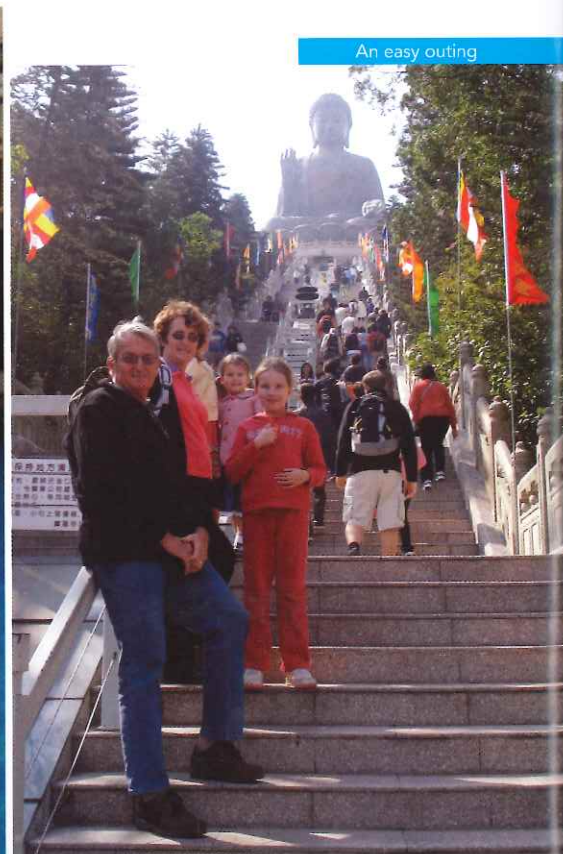
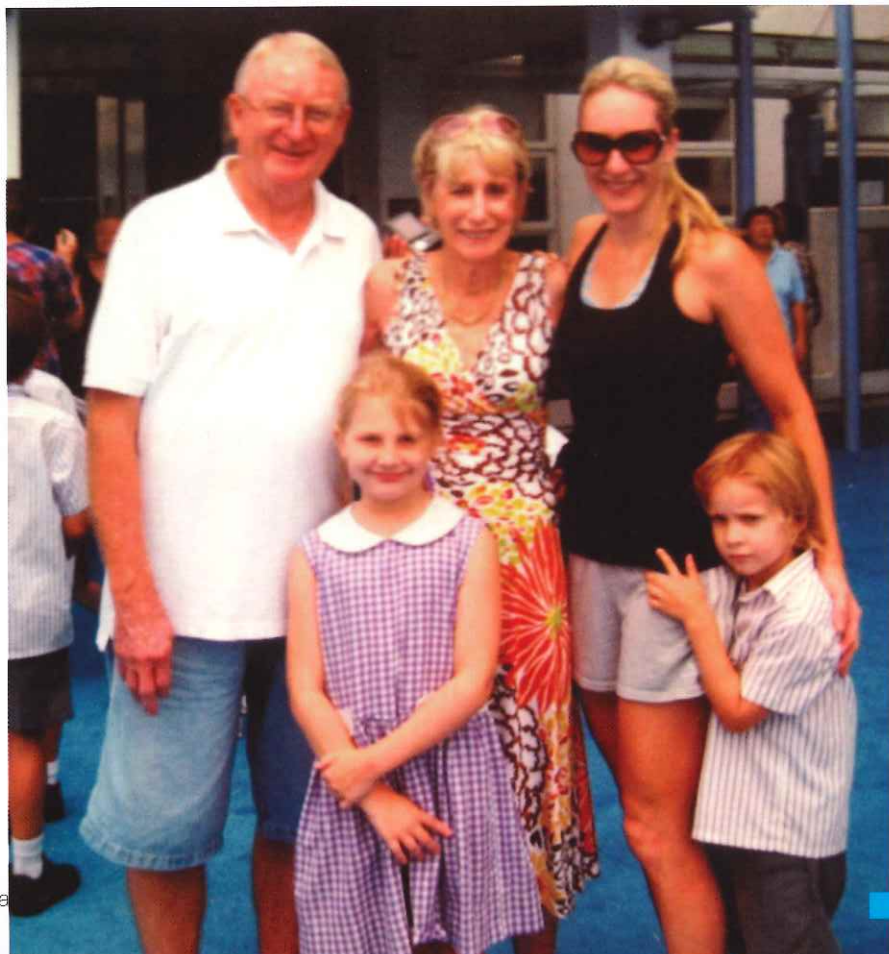
"My parents live in Sydney, my mother-in-law lives in Cape Town, my brother is in Los Angeles with his wife and children, and my sister and her family have moved to England," she explains. "It's a bit of a juggle, but between technology and regular visits, it seems to be working. We spend every Christmas in Australia, every summer with my parents in the Hamptons (which is where we consider 'home'), and every three years we host a big family reunion, again

at our Hamptons house, and everyone flies in. The grandparents also fly over to Hong Kong when they can."

Andersson has been an expat for 25 years and says they have managed to remain very close as a family.

"I have no guilt about being away," she says. "I was brought up to be independent. I don't think you necessarily have to be in the same country to feel close to somebody. There have been challenging moments trying to keep everything hanging together. My mother-in-law found it difficult with all the tech so we waited for her to visit, bought her an iPad and showed her how FaceTime works. There were also worries about the expense of calling, so I bought everyone a Vonage internet phone so calls are now free."

Her children, who attend Hong Kong International School, keep up with their



An easy outing

Take time to bond



Three generations of Spillers.

cousins using FaceTime, recording videos and leaving messages for them.

"We look forward to the long summers," says Andersson. "The grandparents like to hang out with the children. In Hong Kong, they enjoy helping with homework and so forth - simply being there and being with them."

Campbell also stresses the importance of just "being" rather than running around and entertaining.

"Keep visits simple," she says. "Try not to make a big deal of them with big ticket events. Term-time visits are also great rather than waiting until the holidays. Going to school for assembly or having a chat at home will mean far more to all concerned

than a ritzy afternoon tea at the Peninsula. The same goes for when you travel back home. Don't go rushing around."

Hong Kong schools are also doing their bit for family life. Business consultant Kristine Nudds has three children, who attend Hong Kong Academy in Sai Kung.

"The school has a brilliant blog, which encourages overseas family members to log onto. Pictures of the school day are regularly posted, as well as descriptions of what the kids have been up to," she explains.

Nudds moved to Hong Kong four years ago from London with her then 10-, six- and four-year-old daughters.

"We used to visit Granny Larri (my mum) about once a month, so I would say,

ironically, we get better quality time with her here. She comes out twice a year for a few weeks, plus we go back to the UK each summer. The children enjoy staying in touch with her on WhatsApp and Instagram. It was a bit of a learning curve for her."

Nudds says they don't do a huge amount when her mum comes to visit, just the odd junk, hikes around Sai Kung, beach trips and hanging around at home with the kids. "She likes to help with school activities and she just enjoys being with the children," says Nudds.

***If you are concerned about any of the issues raised in this article, Justine Campbell can be contacted at justine@mindquestgroup.com.***

## Favourite granny outings in Hong Kong...

"Stanley Market; meandering the streets of Sai Kung in search of a bargain; and school assembly." **Sandra, Grandma to Saskia, Liam and Neve, Sai Kung.**

"Shopping in Sham Shui Po; exploring the Lanes in Central; enjoying fried rice lunches at *dai pai dongs* and chatting with the owners; dropping the girls at school." **Dorothy, Nana to Bridie and Hope, Lantau.**

"Night races at Happy Valley; Lamma Island for lunch; taking the grandchildren to Ocean Park and Disneyland; and watching our dance-crazy granddaughter perform on stage." **Margaret, Nanny to Soph and Will, Pok Fu Lam.**

"Walking Bowen Road; taking the ferry to Mui Wo and having lunch at The Stoep; shopping on Ladder Street and exploring

Sheung Wan; drinking tea on the sofa with our granddaughters." **Eileen, Nan to Ellie, Natalie and Margie, Mid-levels.**

"A Jaspas junk; visiting the Science Museum with the grandchildren; helping with Lego and homework; school sports carnival." **Christine, Granny to Tilly, India, Scarlet and Harry, Clearwater Bay. ☺**