

A Seeker's Journal

Number 11, Volume 2 Published for AAPA by
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This is an electronic journal

UNRAVELING FAMILY TIES

A LONG WITH the advancing years come questions that heretofore remained out of sight and out of mind. During those years of parenting that most of us lived through, we simply never seemed to think beyond the time when our home echoed the sounds so characteristic of youngsters in residence. When the last child moved out, something that was a part of our lives for years left also. That empty space is a wonderful new lease on life for some, but a dreadful missing element for others. I was left more in the middle of that range of emotional highs and lows—in some respects, I welcomed the respite from the crises that always seem to befuddle neophyte adults. On the flip side, I did miss the daily contact and conversation about the latest discovery or project. The entire level of communication between me and my kids changed when their address changed and it signaled borders forever crossed. I admit that for all the joy I felt at having my offspring step confidently into the world of harsh reality, that joy was dampened somewhat upon realizing that I would no longer be the primary influence in their life. It was sobering to reflect on the fact that my years of guidance would have to suffice—and I hoped that those years had given them the foundation they would need to make good decisions in the future.

Some of my friends grew up in home atmospheres vastly different from mine. While they properly respected their parents, they never seemed to have the same ties that I had. Upon leaving home, these friends removed themselves happily from all parental influence and returning home became a once or perhaps twice a year experience. Such was not my perceived way of preserving family relationships. I wanted to keep in close touch and visit whenever the opportunity came. That was the type family I grew up in and the time I spent with my parents, siblings, friends and neighbors is among the happiest of my days—I wish it were still possible for me to visit them all. Sad to say, however, newer generations look upon such close ties as a practice better buried with those who lived it.

I console myself sometimes by thinking that nothing is without change; that it is not an indication of lack of affection when a child fails to call on my birthday, or to send a card on Father's Day, and yet it is impossible not to remember all the times when I honored my parents

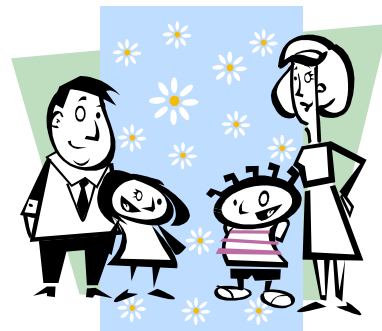
and would never have forgotten an important date. When the card arrives or the call comes a day late, I am pleased—in a sort of resigned way; resigned to the truth that my generation has almost vanished along with those ideas that were part and parcel of life back then. I can't help but feel that we somehow have failed our children.

On the other hand, when I look at the differences in life today compared to what it was seventy years ago, I don't believe that my generation's values could serve younger people today as it served me. There are demands today that did not exist in my day; there are requirements and rules and such vastly different ways of doing things that older ways and means no longer suffice. Progress?

So it is that I find myself making excuses for those late cards and phone calls—there just has not been time in a busy, busy life. No matter how much I explain it away to myself, however, the fact always stands out in my mind and heart that I would not have been guilty of such a slight where my folks were concerned. And so an iota of hurt lingers to stain the carpet of my happiness. But what does it matter?

I have heard it said that for all their lives, parents are responsible for their children, and I think that's true—at least in the sense that parents brought those children into the world. Children who never become parents are not likely to ever experience the truth of that statement—nor to know what feelings are generated when the child does not live up to the expectations of the parent. Here I take a firm grip on my common sense and remind myself that no child is going to live life exactly as the parent wishes. Nor should he. The old saws that we loved as young adults still apply—each must find his own niche, run his own race, be his own man, and make his own way.

With those thoughts, I have come full circle, and here I am living my own life in my own way; answering to no one but myself. And how about those hurtful little stains on the carpet of my happiness? I expect that a mix of forgiveness and love will quickly remove all traces and restore my joy in my children. Life is still good. #



The happiest moments of my life have been the few which I have passed at home in the bosom of my family.

--Thomas Jefferson