

RAISING AND GROWING AS A FAMILY IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

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“The family. We are a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another's desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together.” Erma Bombeck.

In the last decade, there have been notable advances in virtually every field of human endeavor. Think of the progress made in transportation in our own community . . . and think of what it will be like in the next ten years, when I-15 has been rebuilt and high speed rail is a reality. The cars we drive today are not the cars that we drove just ten years ago. For one thing, fewer of them are made in this country.

Think of communications. Fewer and fewer of us are using that hard line phone, instead relying on a cell phone, with lots of features not even thought of a decade ago. Would you have even thought in 2000, when the world of computers was suppose to fail because of the change of the calender to a new century, that today's cell phones would include nationwide calling, email to and from your computer, movies, banking and text messaging.? Yes, text messaging to a phone did not even exist ten years ago!

The list goes on in commerce, medicine, science and electronics. But the fundamental way we live life has lagged behind. We see evidence of increasing strife and hatred. Nationalism seems to be replacing brotherly love. Violence and civil wars are raging. Divorce and diminishing regard for the sanctity of human have eroded the strength of the family - - - the basic unit of society. Immorality, infidelity, and promiscuity, once shunned, are now tolerated, condoned and even protected by court rulings. We have continue to witness growing forms of pornography, with its dark effects on the human soul.

What has happened to us not only in this country, but in the world? The

lofty objectives and high ideals promoted by political and some religious leaders are commendable. Much good has been done, but we should also be objective enough to analyze past activity and recognize worldly trends are becoming assimilated into our everyday lives. We see antipathy between religion and the state that was never intended in our country. We have also seen the misguided meddling of religion into the political arena, where religion has been used as a basis of hate and violence. No one could have foreseen on New Year's day 2000, the events of September 11, 2001. Those so called religiously motivated events changed the world as we previously knew it.

Yet, against the backdrop of the moral changes we have seen around us, the family and proper teaching in a home are still the only things that can stem this tide of darkness. Tolerance of others, yes, but condoning actions that just ten year ago were abhorrent, should not and need not be accepted.

As Utahans, we are unique. We always rank at the top of the charts for a well run state and well run local communities. We have a demonstrated increased length of life greater than the national average, with lower mortality rates from cancer and heart disease than our fellow citizens in other states. We cherish happy and wholesome relationships with our families and others. Our neighborhoods are models of helping and caring in time of natural disaster. Our cities are clean and suffer a much lower crime rate than comparable sized cities in most of the rest of the nation and the world.

So what makes us so different? *** [Story of Camden coming to Utah from Louisiana. "Lots of Churches. Lots of Zebras at the Zoo."]

We need to safeguard the proper relationship of religion to government. We as a people, are under obligation to take strong stands on moral issues in order to preserve a wholesome and ethical country. At the same time, we need to protect religious liberty in this country.

No discussion of the family and the role of religious liberty would be complete without a discussion of the United States Constitution, which is now under fire from many quarters. It was the first written constitution in the world. It has served us as Americans well, enhancing freedom and prosperity during changing conditions for more than two hundred years. After two centuries, every

nation in the world except six have adopted written constitutions and the U.S. Constitution was a model for all of them, even those who chose a parliamentary form of government.¹ Even Utah's constitution was modeled after and in large part copied from the U. S. Constitution.

*** [Story of Kyrgyzstan, their 3 constitutions since 2001 and the recognition of the difference of our people and families from others in the world. "It would take a miracle to have our country finally adopt and live by a constitution." Marat Sultanov, President of the Parliament and eventually Finance Minister.²]

It took a miracle for the U. S Constitution to be drafted and ratified. George Washington was the first to use the word *miracle* in describing the U. S. Constitution. In a 1788 letter to Lafayette, he said:

"It appears to me, the, little short of a miracle, that the delegates from so many different states (which states you know are also different from each other in their manners, circumstances, and prejudices) should unite in forming a system of national Government, so little liable to well-founded objections."³

And a miracle it was. Thirteen colonies and three and one-half million Americans had won independence from the most powerful nation of the world, but we were badly divided on many basic issues. The delegates to the convention ignored the terms of their call for a Constitutional Convention, to merely amend the Articles of Confederation, and instead set out to write an entirely new constitution. They were able to put aside their differences, their narrow loyalties and agree on principles that would govern this nation. As James Madison wrote in the preface to his notes on the Constitutional Convention:

"There never was an assemble of men, charged with a great and arduous trust, who were more pure in their motives, or more exclusively or anxiously devoted to the object committed to them."⁴

But we just about lost everything of that constitutional miracle in a great civil war. "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or

any nation , so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.”⁵

*** [Discuss feelings of the sacrifice given at Gettysburg last month.]

It is part of our civic duty to be moral in our conduct toward all people and most especially to our families. There is no place in responsible citizenship for dishonest or deceit or for willful breaking of the law, even those laws we do not like. We can appeal to both the judicial courts and the courts of public opinion to achieve changes to bad law, but I believe with the author of Proverbs that “righteousness exalted a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.”⁶

The personal morals of our citizens and our families can strengthen our nation more than the largest army. Citizens who care about their families should be ever willing and look forward to fulfilling the duties of citizenship. For example, citizens of high moral character must be willing to serve in elected office and must be willing to serve on juries, even those involving subjects about which they disagree. Citizens who favor morality and strong families cannot leave the passage and enforcement of moral laws to government officials and to jurors who oppose them or who take them lightly.

The single word that best describes the fulfillment of the civic duty to protect families is patriotism. Citizens who care about families should be patriotic. Citizens who care about families should be involved. Citizens who care about families should vote, always vote.

But what can we do in each of our individual families to build and strengthen them? We can:

1. Play together.
2. Eat together.
3. Talk and listen together.
4. Engage in selfless service together.
5. Worship and pray together.

A final thought: Recently I was walking with my six year old grandson, Abbott. It was a nice warm summer morning. As we walked and talked about things of interest to a six year old, he made an interesting comment: “I am walking in Grandpa’s shadow.” I looked at him and indeed he was . . . walking right in my shadow. May our children and grandchildren always want to walk in our shadow.

1. ”The Constitution,” Wilson Quarterly, Spring 1987, pp. 97, 126.
2. Personal conversation in Kyrgyzstan with Mr. Sultanov, September 2005.
3. Quoted in Catherine Drinker Bowen, Miracle at Philadelphia, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966, p. xvii.
4. Quoted in William O. Nelson, The Charter of Liberty, Salt Lake City; Deseret Book Co., 1987, p.44.
5. Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, November 19th, 1863.
6. Proverbs 14:34.