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# On the Importance of Family and Adopted Family

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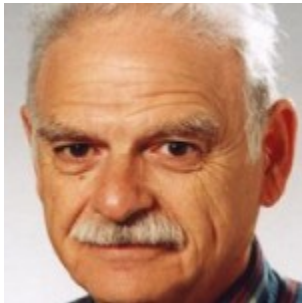
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## Rob McNeilly

creating solutions together

# On the Importance of Family and Adopted Family Rubin Battino, MS



Immediate family includes parents, siblings, and their spouses and children. Extended family include all nephews and nieces, their significant others and their families, and many in-laws. I guess that you can reach further in terms of “blood” relatives. Once upon a time families and extended families lived within walking distance of each other, or a short distance away via some appropriate conveyance. In the modern world we are scattered all over our country, and even abroad. By and large we do not spend much “face” time with each other, and keep in touch via phone and Email and, occasionally, written communications. I have relatives who call each other daily. All of these relatives have “busy” lives of their own which we touch from time to time and on special occasions. Over time some family members get closer, others drift off into the ether, and it is not unusual for “grudges” based on old real or imaginary grievances to exist. We all know that Uncle X will not talk to Aunt Z and that Cousin Y has not communicated with her brother for twenty years. As the end of life nears for some older family members there are instances of reconciliation and even “death-bed” forgiveness and love. Aside from the complications of distance that exist now in many countries and cultures, not much has changed in this picture of families for millennia.

Given the modern family with contact at a distance, what fills the familial gap? For me this is my *adopted* family which consists of people I have “adopted” or who have done the same with me. These are not formal legal adoptions. In the area where I live I have many sisters and brothers. To some I may be an uncle or grandfather. Occasionally, I am a surrogate parent (*in loco parentis*). The transition from friend to adopted family member can be swift or it can develop slowly over time until one day you know that Mary or Jim or George has become adopted family. Let me expand on this theme.

We have visited New Zealand seven times—for the first four times I was a visiting professor in chemical engineering at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch. The last three times we were tourists. We have four sets of close friends in Christchurch and have stayed at the homes of

three of them for various lengths of time. We have hiked extensively with one of the couples and some with another couple. The men in these latter two couples are both chemical engineers and we have interacted professionally over the years. We spent much time with some people we met via friends in Yellow Springs—the two women had grown up together in London and then went separate ways. After the husband and wife had died in Christchurch I asked their daughter if I could “adopt” her daughter. So, in addition to our friends’ daughter and husband I acquired another grand child! I am in regular communication with these four families and they and we feel that we are related and have bonded as family. We do not see each other frequently, yet when we get together it is just like only days have passed since the last time. This is what it is like with family—there are so many shared memories and feelings of closeness that time and distance disappear.

I have had two careers (psychotherapy and chemistry), am still active in both, and have “family” in both areas, in the U.S. and overseas. Recently I attended the 11<sup>th</sup> Erickson Congress on hypnosis and psychotherapy in Phoenix, AZ (Dec. 2011). I was fortunate in being able to spend time with many of my brothers and sisters at that time. One of my “brothers”, who has spent much time immersed in Native American culture always greets me as “Holy Brother.” In the summer of 2009 I was at a chemistry conference in Colorado and slipped right into being with my chemistry family who were attending.

Closer to home there are a number of people where these familial bonds happen more frequently. These may be in weekly or monthly lunch meetings. We have an “old boys” group of retirees from the university who meet weekly for lunch, and have been doing so for 30-40 years. And there are those friends with whom I communicate with an annual Christmas letter, sharing what has happened in our lives in the past twelve months. And they reciprocate. This is what families do—they keep in touch and share.

I have perhaps given too many examples about my adopted family—this was done deliberately to illustrate a variety of ways of adopting and being adopted. Family is everywhere if you are open to people. It is not unusual for bonds with adopted family members to be stronger and more meaningful than those with blood relations, and there is nothing wrong with that. You may wish to take some time now to think about the significant people in your life. Are there individuals, couples, families, or groups that you want to be part of, be closer to, know better? Is there something that stops you from moving ahead on this? Of course, your overtures to get closer or to join may be rebuffed or unsuccessful. Yet, isn’t the possibility of enriching your life this way worthwhile attempting? After some consideration, who will you phone or contact soon? Are there friends and relatives you were close to in the past or who you have lost touch with, that you would like to contact now? I am not into social media like Facebook yet I am aware that they are a powerful way of keeping up and renewing relationships. Life is with people, and adopted family is something that has enriched my life—I hope it will enrich yours.