THE SPIRIT OF FAMILY
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THE FABRIC OF FAMILY

In a perfect world, family relationships would be easy for spiritual people. We would simply shower each other with divine love and let our lights shine. But families can be complicated. The good news is that we have spiritual tools to help us.

In this booklet, New Thought writers tell how they used spiritual principles and faith in God to bring about family harmony or to find strength for the journey. If you have been married or divorced, accompanied a parent to the end of life, had children or ever were a child, you will find stories in these pages that resonate with you.

You will read inspiring lessons from family role models who taught by the way they lived and sometimes how they died. Other family experiences are heartrending: recovering from a loved one’s suicide, deciding whether to end medical treatment, or accepting the mental decline of a parent. Some of the writers have come to understand their families’ painful choices despite the scars that were left. Others recount deep loves and shocking betrayals, and forgiveness runs like a thread through these stories.

As one writer put it, “Every family unit offers the equivalent of a doctoral program in spiritual growth and evolution—if only we will risk receiving it.”

Families provide great challenges as well as incomparable joys. We hope these stories help guide and sustain you and those you love as you create a family.

Your Friends in Unity
How do we define a family? Given the broadest definition, a family is a group of people who are related and/or connected by ancestry, marriage, mutual interests, needs, or desires. There are as many types of families as there are people.

What makes a family thrive? In a single word: love.

As Unity cofounder Charles Fillmore writes in *The Revealing Word* (Unity Books, 1959), love is “the pure essence of Being that binds together the whole human family.”

Our families of origin may evolve with us or may fade into memory as new people come into our lives. We may discover we are living many lifetimes in one incarnation. We may live in different family types that eventually evolve into a heartfelt fit for us.

It serves us well if we can imagine family life to be like dancing. Sometimes we are connected to a partner side by side, doing the same steps in line with each other. Sometimes we are face to face, making up our own moves, jamming to the music differently. Other times we are connected hand to hand, face to face, or body to body in a series of steps either telegraphed or learned. (Interesting that someone is usually willing to dance backwards.) Then there are times when we dance alone, letting the outer music or the inner rhythm guide us.

As with dancing, it is important to do your part to thrive in every kind of family, to join in the creation. Be present. Carry your own weight and be aware of the family as a whole. If there is discord, be the peacemaker, find common ground.

There is a concept taught in dance class and used all over the dance world called “LOD” or “Line of Dance.” It means don’t step on each other’s toes! As soon as you become aware, shift your attitude into love and harmonize your moves with your partner’s.

Other useful ideas from dance are to care about the people you are with. Listen and pay attention. Promote harmony with the music that envelops you and those around you. Share the space and take responsibility for yourself. Look out for your partners. Act respectfully and be graceful—that is, full of grace. Step into the flow of Spirit.

There are so many kinds of families today in part because people have found ways to thrive and honor and dance to their own inner music. One thing we know about the nature of Spirit is that God loves diversity! Whether related by birth or affinity, we are all in the dance of family, and we are all born to thrive. We just need to step lightly and lovingly!

Rev. Toni Stephens Coleman is minister at Unity Lincoln, Nebraska.
For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.—1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)

THE COURAGE TO LEAVE
By Kurt Condra

Scan the family photo albums and in many clans, the photographer is notably absent from the historical record. In my family, that’s Dad.

A journalist by trade, his images of our early years were excellent. This was back when reporters shot in black-and-white and developed their own negatives. His best were candid photos of authentic moments.

My parents’ marriage was coming apart. Mom longed for the comfort and proximity of family and lifelong friends. Dad yearned for a sense of purpose that couldn’t be fulfilled in the small town of their origins. His ambition and talent opened new doors to a wider world where his hopes and dreams could be fulfilled. He left us for a job 2,000 miles away in 1971, when my youngest sister entered kindergarten.

As a child, I couldn’t understand how heartrending that choice must have been for him. I couldn’t see the courage it took to follow the urgings of his spirit, nor the strength required to overcome the guilt and shame heaped on divorced parents, especially the ones who feel called to leave. I didn’t appreciate the commitment required to remain a supportive presence in his children’s lives, especially through our sullen adolescent years when kids would rather be anywhere than with their parents. Before, I could only see through a glass, darkly. Now, having faced my own pain around those events, I clearly see the depth of his courage, strength, and commitment.
Dad’s own adolescence was scarred by his father’s alcoholism and his parents’ divorce. He spent his junior year in high school in near isolation at a sanatorium, recovering from tuberculosis. It left him with a nagging fear that his life would not be long. So throughout his 20s, he worked to overcome that fear with a fierce determination to live full-out, pursuing every opportunity wholeheartedly and wringing maximum benefit from every experience.

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When he was nearing 50 (and I, 30), I went to work in his editorial department. His team of award-winning editors and journalists was scattered across the country to cover every facet of the trucking industry. His connections ran the gamut from drivers and owner-operators to the C-suites of some of the world’s largest carriers and equipment manufacturers, to state and federal transportation heads, even the halls of Congress.

Now in his 80s, Dad is long retired. The stories he reports are from his own life. He researches the most colorful ancestors from our family tree, fact-checking his notes with his older brother and cousins who grew up with him. To his great irritation, physical mobility issues hamper his golf game and limit his travel. Having circled the world, he now contents himself shuttling among California, Michigan, and Florida once or twice a year to spend time with kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids.

The camera and darkroom are long gone. Instead, he’s curating an iPhone movie that, when the time comes, we’re to show at his funeral. It will be the one and only album with Dad appearing in every shot.

In the meantime, I am immensely blessed by the knowing that my father and I now share. And I pray that in striving to emulate his courage, strength, and determination, I might inspire others as he inspires me.

Rev. Kurt Condra is senior minister at Unity on the North Shore in Evanston, Illinois.
LEARNING TO SAY ‘THANK YOU’

By Beatriz Gallerano Bell

It is said that children learn what they live; certainly, adults too. I have had a clear experience in this regard.

When I met Frank, who has been my husband for almost 18 years, one of the things that caught my attention was that he thanked me for whatever I did. It didn’t matter whether it was meaningful to me or not, he thanked me for it. Whether I made coffee, turned on the television, shopped for groceries, or opened the windows of the house—whatever I did, he would say “thank you.”

At first this seemed a bit strange to me, as I was not used to such a wide and general expression of gratitude. I liked it. It made me feel recognized and valued in what I did.

People say you get used to the good soon, so I got used to it and, since it was something I liked, I began to imitate it. I began to be more attentive so as not to miss any opportunity to thank.

Over time I have been incorporating this generalized practice of gratitude, and I have come to understand that saying “thank you” is much more than acknowledging what someone is doing that favors or benefits us in some way.

To say “thank you” makes us aware of how valuable and important the presence of each being is in our lives. Sometimes giving thanks also helps us understand and accept how necessary it has been to live certain experiences, to go through certain situations, and to overcome certain challenges.

Giving thanks helps us change our vision in relation to the circumstances now and even to experiences lived in the past.

Giving thanks transforms resistance into acceptance, complaint into recognition, pain into comfort.

Sometimes we may think it is not necessary, that it is excessive to express gratitude, but the truth is that gratitude is the magnet that attracts our good. The more we give thanks, the more we open our hearts for good to come in.

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First Love: My Grandmother

By Karen Romestan

Her birthplace was Charleroi, Belgium. My birthplace was Charleroi, Pennsylvania. Although the cities of our births carried the same name, they were a world apart. Yet a soul bond joined us together throughout our lifetimes.

She was Germaine LaFebvre Romestan, mother to Melvin Arthur Romestan. I am his daughter, Karen Lee Romestan.

She was my first human connection after Mom gave birth to me. You see, while she awaited my birth, Mom was diagnosed with tuberculosis. This was a death sentence for many in the 1950s, and at the tender age of 22, Mom was whisked away to be treated in a sanatorium. On the other hand, along with my 2-year-old sister, was lovingly carried to Grandma Romestan’s home to live for the next three years.

Having reared 15 children and now a widow, Grandma Romestan took on the task of raising my sister and me with love and tenderness. To hear the stories, we were always dressed in pretty, pressed dresses, and my curls were always neatly held with matching barrettes. Grandma’s love was like no other in my life. Recognizing the unique and special relationship we shared has been a treasure through all my days.

Thankfully Mom survived many months of hospitalization and in time joined us to live at Gram’s house. Eventually Mom was well and strong enough again to care for her family. We moved from Grandma Romestan’s home to a home of our own.

I’ve heard stories of the difficult transition this move was for me, and I have faint memories of sitting at the bottom of the stairs at our new two-story home, waiting for Gram to come, my young mind wondering...