Exploring New Frontiers of Family Life in the United States
By Marlea Welton, Santa Monica, Calif.

> "The family is the basic unit in social life. People are social animals who cannot live alone, and from the moment of birth to the time of death, one's life is a composite of interactions with others. The essential unit in social relationships throughout a lifetime is the family."1
>
> —Daisaku Ikeda, *The Creative Family*

LIKE Marty in the movie *Back to the Future* who was able to transform his family's past by traveling to the future, I hoped that by practicing Buddhism, I would be able to magically change my family. When I was told that the purpose of Buddhism was the fulfillment of one's desires, I thought: "Great. Finally a way to get married, make peace with my parents, start talking to my brother again."

I was convinced I had a very unhappy family. I used to think I had the most unhappy family in the United States. But by the time I started chanting, I no longer was under the illusion that I was the only one who didn't have a Norman Rockwell kind of life. I'm not exactly certain when I decided that my family life was miserable, but I do know that I never told anyone—I was afraid to.

I grew up during the baby-boomer era at a time when, by all accounts, life in the United States never looked rosier. We had come out of the Depression and a major world war and were living in a country that was experiencing the greatest prosperity for the greatest majority in the history of the world. The media (especially TV) had me convinced that everyone else was having a great time. But it wasn't just what I read or saw that made me feel abnormal.

Cheryl, my best friend in high school, had what I considered the perfect family. Her father seemed like a *Father Knows Best* father and her mother was straight out of *Leave It to Beaver*. Her sister was so adorable that it made me cringe to think of my bratty brother in comparison. This was no media hype. Cheryl and I talked every night. If there was something wrong, I certainly would know it.

I underwent a great awakening in college. We all lived in dormitories, and it was hard to conceal the truth. We sat around at night and compared notes, and we all had a horror story to tell. Everyone had been covering up the sorry mess of their family life. No one had invented the word *dysfunctional* yet, but it was clear that truly happy family life eluded most of my contemporaries. And then, just to settle the issue, the unbelievable happened: Cheryl called me from Michigan State to tell me that her parents were getting a divorce. The unbelievable happened, and it was happening to us all.

I began practicing Buddhism the year I graduated and it brought a new hope. Maybe I could change myself and my family. But what was the ideal kind of family to have? And what did I have to do to make it happen?

I tried getting my family to chant, but, unbelievably, they resisted. I felt I was offering them something really great—happiness, world peace and enlightenment—but to no avail. I jokingly said I would have to drag them, kicking and screaming, to

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kosen-rufu, to the best thing they could ever hope for. Even the joke fell on deaf ears. I was perplexed, but my leaders encouraged me not to push and to chant for my family's happiness and to become happy myself. So for the first twenty years of my practice, I got on with my life and stopped insisting that they (and/or my current boyfriend) should practice Buddhism so that they could become happy. I embarked on my own human revolution and tried to be a good example that they might like to emulate. I put off my search for the ideal family while I pursued my own human revolution.

Meanwhile, it became common knowledge that happy family life in the United States was a myth about to be shattered. Divorce rates were skyrocketing and more kids were home alone and on the street. The sexual revolution and the "Me" generation were eroding committed relationships. Family values had not become a buzzword yet, and people even questioned if the family as an institution was outmoded. Even if the verdict was out on that question, everyone agreed that the family structure was changing, if not almost disintegrating.

After twenty years of practice, I made a new personal determination—I would spend the next ten years challenging my elusive goal of a happy family. Coincidentally, I also started graduate school in anthropology. For my thesis, I chose a topic related to certain aspects of housework and the role of the housewife in the family, and it was from this academic vantage point that I began to search for answers to my questions about happy families.

SINCE women have traditionally been more responsible for family matters, I felt the key to understanding happy families was linked to understanding the woman's role in that family. I had always believed women in the United States were forerunners of the women's movement worldwide. While doing my research, I was especially impressed reading about the Seneca Falls Declaration on Women's Rights. The women were visionaries about equal rights as far back as 1848. It was also during the mid-nineteenth century that another trend emerged: pioneering women and men on the Western frontier were co-equal partners—sharing all labors and duties together.

The image of the pioneer on the frontier has always been inspiring to me. It seemed to capture the essence of the American spirit. When I first became a Buddhist and was told that we were "pioneers" for world peace, I felt doubly inspired. Pioneers have also been popular with the media. In the '60s and '70s, we were deluged with Western TV shows and movies portraying brave women on the wagon trains. In the '80s, a number of women's journals from the Westward expansion were published. I read these journals for my research and became even more inspired by these women.

Others have also been inspired by this concept. Daniel Boorstin, historian and former Librarian of Congress, believes the frontier spirit is basic to what has made the United States great. He says "that place of encounter between the westward-moving settlement of modern Europeans and the wilderness ... [is] that secret of American vitality and the incubator of American democracy."[2] The image of pioneer women and pioneers for world peace became one in my mind.

Suddenly I saw the connection with the difficulty of creating a new way of

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family life. Those of us who wanted to have happy families were pioneers. We wanted something that had never been done before—a new definition of family and a new way of being.

Our country has been in the vanguard of creating new ideas—among them, democracy, a country born of a confederation of states, and women's equality. But we don't just "discover" these ideas—we create them. The creation is not really a "discovery" of something that already exists. Daniel Boorstin makes the distinction between the spirit to explore and the spirit to discover. He says that exploration of the unknown is America's "great contribution to the World Experience:

> The discoverer simply uncovers, but the explorer opens. The discoverer concludes a search; he is a finder. The explorer begins a search; he is a seeker. And he opens the way for other seekers. The discoverer is the expert at what is known to be there. The explorer is willing to take chances.[3]

Put in those terms, part of the difficulty of finding a model for the ideal family was that no model truly existed. I/we had to explore it, not discover what was already out there. As pioneers, we had to be willing to seek and open the way for other seekers. And we had to be willing to take chances.

So I write this article to give you background, history and insight, as well as my anthropological perspective on family life in the United States. This is my role in writing, even though by doing so I am only "discovering" what other people have said about the subject. I leave the exploring to you, the readers. You are the ones who will explore the new frontiers, based on Buddhist wisdom and the pioneer spirit, to open the way for other seekers of happy family life. Good luck on your journey!

The Importance of Family Life

> More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all.[4]
> —"The Treasures of the Heart"

OTHER than food, clothing and shelter, love and companionship are probably one of the most basic of human necessities. Daisaku Ikeda likens a family to an organism, and says that if society is a human body, "then each family is a group of cells. The family is the only organism by which love can be transacted between husband and wife, parents and child, brother and sister."[5] To understand how this biological system works, we also need to understand the basis of its dynamism. Therefore, in order to understand human family life, we also have to understand human nature and human culture.

Francis Fukuyama, an economist with the Rand Corporation, calls the family one of the "three broad paths to sociability: The first is based on family and kinship, the second on voluntary associations outside kinship such as schools,

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clubs, and professional organizations, and the third is the state...."[6] Of the three paths, only the family is the one whose existence is based largely on love, trust and human solidarity. No other institution is so basic or so universal; no other human system so wholly committed to accumulating the treasures of the heart. Having a happy family life is a goal we could probably say is shared by people the world over.

The structure of the family does vary widely throughout the world. Unlike all non-human primates (apes, chimpanzees and other monkeys) that organize identically irrespective of the time or place, human family and kinship groups vary significantly from culture to culture.[7] In other words, monkeys group themselves exactly the same regardless of country or time; human family groups are different in different cultures.

THE diversity and variety of family structures is truly intriguing. People in industrial societies assume that the most common family system is the nuclear family (also known as the Eskimo system). It consists of two generations—husband, wife and their offspring—who live together. Although it is widespread, it is by no means universal. While we may think the nuclear family is "normal," there are many other arrangements. Just two examples of a myriad possibilities are female members of the Nayars in India who go through a formal wedding in childhood, but never live with their husband; instead they have a series of affairs with visiting lovers. Or people on the islands in the Caribbean where most families are matrifocal (mother and children living together). Men circulate throughout the community and establish relationships with different women.

In our contemporary American culture, there are a great diversity of family types. David Schneider says that "[a]lmost every conceivable kind of variation seems to be present in American kinship and family practices"[8] due to the long history of immigration from other countries. Family structures we may encounter from other countries are: extended or stem families (from Oriental or European families) consisting of an elderly couple with their eldest son, his wife, and their children; joint families (from China) where brothers live in the same household with their wives and offspring, and even perhaps the parents of the brothers; and the tradition of "other mothers" as described by Patricia Hill Collins who are trained to assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities.[9] This tradition began because the African-American community recognized that it may not be wise or possible to vest one person with full responsibility for mothering.

In addition to the above recognized anthropological categories of family types brought by immigration from other cultures, we also have contemporary American innovations which are not yet formally categorized: single-parent families; blended or reconstituted families (with one or two remarried partners and their current and/or previous offspring from another marriage); childless marriages; partnerships of same or different sex agreements without the benefit of marriage; and people living alone.

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History of American Families and American Communities

> The peopling of British North America was an extension outward and an expansion in scale of domestic mobility in the lands of the immigrants' origins, and the transatlantic flow must be understood within the context of these domestic mobility patterns.[10]

ALTHOUGH we may talk about diversity of family types in the United States, there are similar cultural themes which run through our history. As quoted above, North American settlement has always been tied to domestic (family) movement. Some cultural terms regarding this movement have changed through the centuries. For example, in the eighteenth century, the word *family* included everyone living in one house, whether or not they were blood kin. Currently, however, contemporary definitions of the terms family and relative refer to someone related by blood or marriage. A family is considered a natural unit, and one in which members live together under one roof. Since family members are related by a common biogenetic heredity, it is impossible (to an American way of thinking) to stop being, for example, brother and sister or father and son. Even if you try to legally disown or disinherit children, to those who know the facts "nothing can really terminate or change the biological relationship which exists between them, and so they remain blood relatives." [11]

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the push to settle the far reaches of this country was accomplished, in large part, by families. Bailyn says that families were key to the growth of these areas because of "the demand they created, the markets they enlarged ... Above all, they were eager to take advantage from the start of opportunities created by the opening up of new land in America."[12]

In addition to strong family ties, however, strong community ties were also important—we have always had "a rich network of voluntary associations and community structures to which individuals have subordinated their narrow interest."[13] Having strong family ties has never stood in the way of our economic and political development. In our culture, cooperation with others is encouraged. Fukuyama says that close families ties and cooperation with others are not always synonymous; in fact, they can be inversely related to each other.

> ...cultures in which the primary avenue toward sociability is family and kinship have a great deal of trouble creating large, durable economic organizations and therefore look to the state to initiate and support them. Cultures inclined toward voluntary associations, on the other hand, can create large economic organizations spontaneously and do not need the state's support.[14]

In other words, if one trusts only his or her own family, it is very difficult to place trust in voluntary associations, such as schools, clubs and professional organizations

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(which include the work place). A society which turns its trust solely on the family relies on the state to make decisions or begin reforms. It is difficult to create a flourishing economy when most of the power is vested in the state, and not vested in spontaneous and voluntary economic organizations. Fukuyama also comments that another factor which promotes this trust is religion.

> Sectarian religious communities like the Baptists, Methodists, and Quakers created small, tightly knit groups whose members were bound to each other through common commitments to values like honesty and service. This cohesion served them well in the business world, since business transactions depend to a great degree on trust.[15]

Although Fukuyama's background is in economics, the translation of the idea of trust to the spiritual realm cannot be mistaken. In naming his book *Trust*, Fukuyama was also talking about spiritual values. He gave examples of trust in our society by things we take for granted—people rarely leaving a restaurant or gasoline pump without paying or when people cement business transactions with a word or handshake. Even though we may see trust eroding in certain areas of our society, Fukuyama's point is clear: We are not a totalitarian state and we carry on much of our daily lives with implicit trust in other people's behavior.

David Schneider also found a similar phenomenon in his study of American kinship. He calls both family bonding and bonding between friends based on "diffuse solidarity"—meaning not narrowly confined to a specific goal ("diffuse") and something which is supportive, helpful and cooperative ("solidarity").

Schneider calls the love among family members *enduring* diffuse solidarity because that love does not have a specific goal or a specific limited time in mind. As the old adage goes, you can pick your friends, but not your relatives. That's both the good news and the bad news. Having a wide set of social contacts has definitely been primary to the making of our great country; it does not, however, undermine being close to one's family. Actually, as Fukuyama and Schneider have documented, both phenomenon are closely related.

History has also been influential in shaping American culture. To help understand history's influence on family life, I propose to examine two periods in our history, the Colonial era (1700) and the Civil War (1850). Since the next 150-year period will end at the new century, perhaps we can conjecture how future trends will develop from this snapshot of two periods in our past.

The Colonial Era

> [T]he pull of the American colonies ... became an independent force ... created by entrepreneurship, promotion, and the sheer magnetism of economic betterment and religious toleration.[16]

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WHEN Europeans settled our country, many were fleeing religious persecution. Some, but not all, came as families. Many were seeking economic opportunity or escaping from the tyranny of religious and political forces. At first, only the young and strong could survive the ocean voyage and the harsh conditions of the first settlements. Many family members were left behind. In particular, there were few elderly, which may explain why the United States, more than any other industrial country, has traditionally relegated the elderly to separate living quarters from the nuclear family.

Although nuclear family structure was imported from the Motherland, the families who came depended more strongly on each other than they did in Europe. More cooperation was needed to help build houses, procure goods, and self govern (hence the famous New England townhall meetings).

Life was continually being reinvented, and with less interference from tradition, new ways of creation were possible. Boorstin calls this the "therapy of distance [which] worked in countless ways. Distinctions of social classes, which in Europe had been reinforced by all these other distinctions, did not survive intact in the New World ... American experience would show the world what a purging could for ancient institutions."[17]

Family structures would eventually be reinvented, but during the Colonial era, European traditions still predominated. The breakdown of gender responsibility was still the same; women were in charge of the interior of the house, and men took care of everything outside. But women were more valued in the New World. Although men still dominated women in the colonies, their authority was "based on legal, political and religious coercion, not on men's greater economic importance." Perhaps the family unit become even more important during this time because it was viewed as a castle in the wilderness. Phillip Greven describes a "genteel" family in colonial America around 1770:

> [T]he family circle was felt to be the most secure place in the entire world—happy, embracing, forgiving, reliable, and free from selfishness. The members not only felt an extraordinarily strong sense of love for one another, they also felt an equally intense sense of obligation and of interest in one another. The family thus became something larger and more important than any single member....[18]

When the colonists began the next settlements westward, it was families who pushed on to the new frontiers. In *The Peopling of British North America*, Bailyn noted that "families, and not the many isolated emigrants bound in indentures to serve any master who could buy their services were destined to be the frontiersmen in this new segment of the American population."[19] This was to continue, and actually intensify, for the next 150 years.

The Civil War/American Renaissance—1850

> Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation — in view of the unjust laws

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above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.[20]

Seneca Falls Declaration on Women's Rights

THE United States at mid-nineteenth century was seething with change, both positive and negative. Americans continued to populate even more territories, especially with the discovery of gold; Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau were forging the philosophical basis for the American Renaissance; and war between the North and South was about to erupt over the issue of slavery. During this tumultuous time, women staked claim on their own personal frontier and began to campaign for equal rights. Women who migrated out West and were settling the newest territories were no longer confined to duties inside the house; men and women began the era of "co-equal" partnerships in which division of labor based on gender became less distinct. As Joanna Stratton stated: "[m]en and women worked together as partners, combining their strengths and talents to provide food and clothing for themselves and their children. As a result, women found themselves on a far more equal footing with their spouses."[21]

Meanwhile back East, women, particularly Quaker women, began actively campaigning for women's rights. Many of them met each other through joining the abolitionist movement of William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison was converted to the cause of anti-slavery by the Quaker, Benjamin Lunde, in 1823. He was an active abolitionist and editor of a newspaper known as *The Liberator*. He developed a number of followers, many of them Quakers and some of them women. He attended the first Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. It was at this convention that two women who would become pioneers of the women's movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, met each other. At the second Anti-Slavery Convention in 1841, Garrison discovered that Lucretia Mott was refused admission to the convention because she was a woman. This infuriated Garrison. He said, "After battling so many long years for the liberation of African slaves, I can take no part in a convention that strikes down the most sacred rights of all women."[22]

Some historians have said that this incident was the original spark for the future of the women's movement. Seven years later in 1848, Stanton and Mott met with three other women around a tea table in a small town in upstate New York. Their purpose at that time was to draft what became a remarkable document, known as the Declaration of Women's Rights. Part of it is quoted above.

After drafting the document, the women moved rapidly. They held a conference two weeks later in Seneca Falls, New York, which was attended by 300 women and forty men (William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglas among them). The convention and the document were definitely an exploration, as Boorstin would define it, of female and family rights. The words and ideas of those women in 1848 still ring with a vitality and freshness which enabled women the world over to seek

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equals rights. As moments in history go, it was a time for Americans to be proud.

Seven of the original sixteen founders of the women's rights movement were Quakers. In addition to being religious, many were very involved in their family lives. All but Susan B. Anthony were mothers. In later years, Susan B. Anthony was to look back and count—of the fifteen women (other than herself) who had married, they had successfully raised sixty-six children! These were not merely full-time revolutionaries, but working women in the true sense of the word.

The women's rights movement, which would become the family rights movement, was profoundly influenced by religion, Quakerism in particular. It was no coincidence that the Quakers (also known as the Society of Friends) would play such an important role. The Quaker philosophy was based on the spiritual equality of men and women.

> From its inception, the Society of Friends had always recognized the spiritual equality of women with men as a corollary of the belief in the indwelling of the Light in each person.... While Quakerism obviously did not claim secular equality for women, the opportunities it offered its female members and the dignity it accorded them could nurture such a claim.[23]

The Quakers who originally came to this country were fleeing religious persecution. When they moved here, they championed the causes of anti-slavery as well as female equality, largely due to the very democratic structure of their prayer meetings. The seven Quaker women who were involved in the female rights' movement had varying levels of commitment to the Society of Friends. Susan B. Anthony (perhaps the most famous spokesperson) was born to a Quaker father and a Baptist mother and was raised as a Quaker. Although she never officially joined the church as an adult, she always maintained that her upbringing had been very influential in forming her views.

Lucretia Mott, on the other hand, was very committed to the religion. She was, in fact, a minister, whose sermons were well-attended and well-documented. But her views were not "narrowly sectarian, but reflected the universal teachings of the Spirit itself."[24] Again, it was the combination of the democratic push for freedom from religious and civil tyranny and the pioneering spirit that resulted in another breakthrough in world history: female and family rights.

The Current Dilemma

> Since society is nothing but a collection of many families, if we do not have peaceful homes then we cannot have a peaceful society. However, civilization does not regard the home as very important, and the home has become a casualty of progress. Out of this has come the tragedy of environmental destruction and war, and from the kind of education produced by contemporary civilization have come people who have forgotten what the meaning of being human is.[25]
>
> —Daisaku Ikeda

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AS more women enter the work force, they are spending less time with their families. This is an unalterable fact. Even with the addition of hired substitutes (babysitters, daycare and after-school activities) and relatives who help, adults spend less supervised time with children. Less time is being spent on building the family support system. It has become increasingly more difficult to recreate that colonial dream where the family circle is larger and more important than any one member and is the most secure place in the world.

In addition, women are choosing to spend less time at home. As Arlie Hochschild reported in her book, *Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, even given the option to work less hours and take advantage of family-friendly policies, women often don't. Why?

Ms. Hochschild's book is a sociological study of a major corporation (disguised in the book under a fictitious name) which made many family-friendly work practices available such as flex time, job sharing and availability of day care centers. For five years, she interviewed and became acquainted with employees in the corporation in order to study how and why women and men were dividing their time between home and work. What she discovered confounded her at first. She found that, given the opportunities for these family-oriented work options, women often declined them. She concluded that women were driven by economic necessity and a male-dominated ethos at work, as well as by the lack of support from a society which believes that caring for one's family is not as important as economic freedom. Women thus became managers who "outsourced" the jobs of mothering by hiring others. She goes on to say:

> Women fear losing their places at work, and having such a place has become a source of security, pride, and a powerful sense of being valued. … women are just as likely as men to feel appreciated at the workplace, as likely as men to feel underappreciated at home, and even more likely than men to have friends at work. Cutting back on work hours, to such women, means loosening ties to a world that, tension-filled as it is, offers insurance against even greater tension and uncertainty at home. ... Women now compose nearly half the American labor force. The vast majority of them need and want to be there. There is definitely no going back. The difficulty is not that women have entered the workplace but that they have done so 'on male terms.' It would be fine for women to adopt the male model of work, to enjoy privileges formerly reserved for men, if this model were one of balance. But it is not.[26]

If this continues, our society may well bear out the dire predictions of the death of the family as we know it. Even if we agree the current family structure is ineffectual and unwieldy, how can we continue to promote love and enduring solidarity without the benefit of something in its place? If family life and relatives are no longer important, how will we continue?

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Happy Families

> Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.[27]
>
> —Tolstoy

TOLSTOY began his story of families (*Anna Karenina*) with the above quotation and spent an entire novel explaining what he meant. There are no easy answers to the question, "What makes a happy family?" Nonetheless there are common threads running through the lives of happy families in all cultures. I would say that, based on research and personal experience, three words might describe the attributes of happy family members: trusting, warm and open-minded. Moreover, all three must be present as components of a happy family dynamic because all three are interrelated.

While people may feel that coming from a close-knit family is a highly desirable goal, members of close-knit or warm families are not always trusting of others or open-minded. As we have already seen from Fukuyama's book, trusting only one's family can lead to people who do not trust one another and thus create an insular society. Therefore, being open-minded must be one of the prime prerequisites for a healthy family and a healthy society. These sentiments are emphasized by Daisaku Ikeda when he says:

> There is no group as vulnerable to unhappiness as a family that is closed off from the rest of society. I would like to see the kind of family equipped with a strong life force which will allow them to gauge and cope with the powers of the storm, even while buffeted by the rapid change in society. That family would be always open, ready to fight the evils that fill society. Families such as these in a society are like the white corpuscles and antibodies that fight disease in the human body.[28]

Creativity and strong life force are necessary to create open families. Creativity and a strong life force can be greatly enhanced by philosophy and religion. As we have seen from the women's movement in the United States, the egalitarian viewpoint of Quaker women formed a strong foundation for the future of women's rights.

In order to establish a creative new structure for family life, we will need to call upon many philosophies and religions who can open-mindedly encourage each other to establish ground-breaking precedents in many different forms of family life. For those of us in the United States, it will mean continuing on with the pioneering tradition by creating new ideas and new ways of thinking.

However, just being open-minded and trusting is not enough—warmth and sharing the treasures of the heart are truly at the core of what it means to have relatives. In *The Meaning of Things*, Mihaly Csikszemntmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton interviewed 300 people from eighty-two families in the Chicago area in an attempt to understand how contemporary Americans relate to

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objects in their homes. They also were able to observe why some families seemed to be happier than others. They found that "warmer" family members were better able to become successful members in society. They defined members of warm families as displaying "personality traits of warmth, caring, orderliness, positive self-concept, and lack of suspiciousness."[29]

They go on to say:

> The advantages of a warm, emotionally integrated family are clear. ... internally focused families have more energy to invest in outside goals and activities: In warm households, the attention one receives from the family gives assurance of one's own worth, thus one is relatively freer to invest psychic energy in goals that go beyond self-ish intentions.... It truly seems that investment of psychic energy in the household frees attention for broader goals and tasks instead of just absorbing attention and tying it down to the maintenance of the family. The "return" on the "investment" seems worth the effort, for those who freely give their attention to their family to create a warm home ultimately have a richer, more diverse public life as well.[30]

These comments reaffirm the thoughts of Fukuyama and Ikeda that the presence of a strong and supportive family creates a healthier and more diversified society.

Great creativity and life force are mandatory in establishing these kinds of families. It is not necessarily the amount of time spent with family members that counts. Csikszentmihalyi's study found that "the warm families in our midst are practically invented by their members. Outside constraints are relatively light; the meanings that keep these families together are woven and mended by the constant attention of those who comprise them."[31] In order to fill in the gaps caused by the lack of time, we must come up with creative solutions, more creative than we ever thought possible. The invention of new family lifestyles is part of why Boorstin calls us explorers of the unknown.

Exploring new paths is never easy. As Daisaku Ikeda says: "In any age, reform requires energy. Instead of sitting back and waiting, it is necessary to positively participate in creating a new age."[32]

New Frontiers

> Perhaps the greatest American opening has been toward boundless new vistas of the unknown and the unpredictable. The most important American addition to the World Experience was the simple surprising fact of America. We have helped prepare mankind for all its later surprises. America has invigorated the whole human quest for openings, and has provided a new energy and new resources for that quest. We are a source of faith, hope and charity for all who share the exploring enterprise.[33]

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—Daniel J. Boorstin

AFTER doing my research, I finally came full circle upon the image of Marty in the movie *Back to the Future*. I began to find a new appreciation for my own family. After all, if I felt my friends were my family, it was because I had come from a healthy family life and could make warm ties outside of the family structure. If I was able to become a Buddhist without any objection from my parents, it was because of their implicit trust and support for my own identity. And if I descried the fact that family life in America was deteriorating, it was because I could dare to dream for something better.

I have never lived in a traditional family setting during any of my adult life. For seven years, I took care of my aging mother. I have had roommates, housemates, boyfriends and cats with whom I shared my space. I've never recreated the ideal of the nuclear family myself, but then, I'm in the majority. Statistics show that only twenty-seven percent of people in the United States are living in what is considered a classic nuclear family. As Schneider remarked, every "conceivable kind of variation" of family life exists in the United States, creating communities that resemble global villages throughout our country.

Since we have always been pioneers anyway, let's become global pioneers. Let's create new lifestyles and new family styles that will be emulated throughout the world. To accomplish this, we need to carry with us the treasures of the heart, and we need to be bold. We need to explore the unknown seas of family life. There is no model to follow. As it says in the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, bloom as only you can, whether it be a plum, damson or cherry tree blossom. But bloom as you are and together we will create new frontiers of family life in the United States. ❑

Marlea Welton has a bachelor of science degree from Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., and a master's in anthropology from Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. She has taught in colleges in Indiana and California. Marlea is past chairperson and acting secretary of the United Nations of L.A., an official SGI-USA association devoted to research and education about the United Nations.

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