

MaMaw and the Extended Family Ideal

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How does one explain the deepest experiences of love through words? It is impossible, but we try our best. Our families provide a foundation for these experiences and are meant to continue and grow over time, and hopefully expand out to others.

I was born in 1950 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, during the post-WWII era, a time of great hope and development in America. Life was very simple, without TV, computers, cell phones, and with few modern conveniences. It was a time when most went to church on Sunday. We all knew our neighbors, who were often like family and watched out for each other with love and concern. We rarely thought about locking the doors to our homes. Most of us kids spent our days outside in our yards, or on bicycles, or in wooded areas near our homes. Behind my house were hundreds of acres of undeveloped land for us to play in, build treehouses and forts. There were endless trails to walk and ride. It was the best of times.



Four Generations

Many of my fondest memories growing up come from spending time at my paternal grandparents' home, which was very close to where we lived. I guess you could say it was like a second home, where we were always welcome. From when I was a young boy, we would spend every Sunday afternoon and evening eating together and just hanging out in their simple home. My Grandma, who we called Ma-Maw, was the best cook in the world. Everything she prepared was done with so much love and tasted great. We would also spend the holidays together, where she would spend

hours preparing elaborate meals for us to consume. She always had an unlimited amount of freshly-made chocolate chip cookies and plenty of ice cream on hand for all to enjoy. Their small backyard became a place for stickball, or just hanging out on the quilts that my Grandmother made.

At their home, they had a screened-in porch where we would spend much of our time together. All of us kids would compete to sit next to Ma-Maw on the couch swing, so we could rest our heads and cuddle into her plump and soft arms. Even to this day, I remember her pleasant scent. Ma-Maw also had a great sense of humor and would have us laughing our heads off as she shared her stories of working in a fancy hotel in town. We would sometimes have sleepovers at her home and each morning she would jump into

bed with us and tickle us till we could not breathe anymore. She also loved to sew dresses for my sisters, and taught them to sew, a tradition that seems to be lost these days.

I learned so much about God and the importance of the family from my Grandma. She would find any excuse to get me in her car and all she talked about was God, Family, and Love! She not only talked about it; she lived it. She was never pushing church or religion onto me but shared what she learned from God and her own family. I feel deeply that the seeds of my faith were first planted through watching and experiencing God through her. She was a very simple person, but she understood what was most important. She was always sensitive to the needs of others and gave endlessly to all of us. There were many times when what I needed would mysteriously show up at just the right time. She was always trying to find out what we needed and did her best to meet those needs.



As I reflect back on my experiences growing up, I can now say what we were experiencing was one family under God. This living example from my Grandma was passed on to my parents, who were warm and always welcoming most everyone into our home. Our home became a gathering place for many of the kids in our neighborhood. You could say we were, in the truest sense, an extended family. Now, this tradition continues through our own children and grandchildren, into an ever-expanding realm of love.

If we are to establish the extended family concept and build one family under God, then this truly begins with our own families, living this ideal in substance. Once we experience this extended family ideal, there is no turning back, only moving forward.