

NNPA FEATURE

Child Watch

By Marian Wright Edelman



Celebrating Families

Cousin Mary was someone you were tight with, growing up in the old neighborhood. She taught you how to jump rope and play "kick the can." You also fought like cats and dogs over the silliest things, but she was your best friend.

Today, Cousin Mary is grown and you don't even know her children's names. You rarely talk on the phone, and sometimes miss the usual Christmas card exchange. It is completely unintentional. You leave the neighborhood and slowly drift apart.

Relatives shouldn't be separated forever. Consider organizing a special reunion to reacquaint yourself with Cousin Mary. Before you know it, Cousin Mary's, Aunt Maggie's and Grandmother Jones' families are gathered around you exchanging family anecdotes. News that a few years ago seemed unimportant becomes really interesting -- because it's family.

back to his home state since 1936. "This is where it all began," he said.

Large or small, elaborate or simple, family reunions are growing increasingly popular. Whatever the type, their basic purpose is bringing families together. But they have other important benefits.

The annual Black Family Reunion sponsored by the National Council of Negro Women in major cities around the country, is a successful event that does more than reunite people. It also provides beneficial family education programs. Separate theme pavilions provide current information on health care, education, parent-child relations, parental skills, discipline, family values, aging and many other issues.

Besides important educational information, part of the whole Black experience is discovering your family's heritage as the Colemans did.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund, a national voice for children.

A recent Wall Street Journal article cites one family's reunion having a similar beginning.

The Colemans started with twenty people back in 1976. It was a simple family gathering at a Houston home. They were discussing Alex Haley's *Roots*, when they got the idea to trace their family's lineage. Eighty-four-year-old Aunt Gerri provided the family history. One Coleman recalls getting down on the floor with meat-wrapping paper and writing. They eventually produced a 25-yard long, 250-name family tree.

Fourteen years later the Colemans boast of their 150-person gathering. This year's reunion was so large they practically took over a hotel. Each family pays an activity fee, which includes a sight-seeing tour of the city in which they reunite.

One Coleman was extremely pleased with the family's success. "This is a sight to behold," he declared. He had not been

Beyond the family bond, young and old can bridge the generation gap. Youth tend to seek contemporary role models in television, movies, sport and music personalities. However, they need not look beyond their own family and community. Role models could be parents or siblings who have achieved in the outside world, or relatives who may lack education and money but are upstanding, moral people in the community.

Role models are also the supportive friends and neighbors who cared for you when your mother was late coming home, or brought you chicken soup when you were ill. We cannot take these people for granted.

I was fortunate to grow up surrounded by my family's and neighbors' love and support. My neighbors were my watchful extended parents who reported on me when I did wrong and applauded when I did well. They valued family life, family rituals, and tried to be and expose us to

good role models. So let us celebrate with our

JACOB

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estimate market size and other key business factors.

families because in troubled times, we need the strength of family ties to keep us together. As one Coleman descendant puts it, "We want our kids to have a sense of family, and self-worth and to know who they are."

So now its time for government to do the same with the critical census task of determining how many people live in our country and where they are.

A fair and accurate census count is an economic, political, and civil rights issue of the first magnitude. It's time for a recount -- but not with the old methods that no longer work.

The government should go back to the drawing boards and assemble the best scientific tools available to develop a recount that no longer shortchanges cities and the poor.

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