

Take home message: the traditional family, whose breakdown is responsible for a host of ills, according to conservative thinking, was a myth that never really existed.

The family in which my children were raised was never traditional. We were a blended family. There were adoptions. We hosted foster children. And then my wife died. Like Amber, I truly discovered what those words meant, "It takes a village to raise a child." We lived that experience. My UU Church community in Davis contributed through the outstanding youth programs such as Coming of Age and Our Whole Lives. They contributed through mentoring, in ways both formal and informal. Other people in other communities stepped up in ways small and large: school, sports, family friends. We were held. We were loved.

Let me give an example. Our Whole Lives, or OWL, is a series of curricula developed jointly by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ that educates about our bodies, sexuality and healthy relationships through our entire lives. There are programs that teach to all ages, with the flagship program targeted at middle school youth. All of my children have participated in OWL. As their parent, I generally received little feedback from my children, although I was familiar with the material through parent meetings. However, I was wholly committed to the value of the program through my own experience of teaching it many years before. My trust in the teachers and in the program was born out when I overheard my daughter describing OWL to a friend. Her words: "It was wonderful." How many of you would use these words to describe your sex education class in school?// It takes a village.

My family was and is not traditional. What is the so-called "traditional family?" The traditional family of Western sociology comprises a middle class family with a breadwinner father, a homemaker mother and biological children. This was once considered the norm by sociologists in this country, but this thinking has since been rejected among academics. Most families are not now traditional.

I doubt that most families ever were. The traditional family was middle class. Prior to the end of WWII, there wasn't much of a middle class in this country, so by definition, earlier families were not traditional. The traditional family seems to have been a quirk of the post-World War II environment in this country. Men returning from the war were able to hold down jobs that paid well enough to feed a family without supplemental income. Women, who had held those jobs during the war, were quickly relegated to the role of homemakers. The role of homemaker meant something entirely different in the post-war manufacturing environment of urban and suburban life than it had on a family farm.

If most families were not "traditional" for most of our history, then what were they? Families were once multi-generational, living under the same roof. Child bearing was hazardous; many mothers died in child birth. Fathers remarried. Life was more hazardous in general. Parents died. There were state-run orphanages.

Asya told me that she learned in her feminist studies that some fathers, unhappy with their home situation, just disappeared, to reinvent themselves and perhaps remarry somewhere else. While you still occasionally hear these stories, it was much easier to pull off during the westward expansion of the United States, with vast distances and poor communication.

Prior to the Civil War, the majority of people in the South were slaves. During 245 years of legal slavery in this country, biological families were often split up through the sale of spouses or children.ⁱ By law, lineage among slaves was through the mother. Thus, a child born of rape by a white owner with a black slave mother was born a slave. No traditional families here.

Even during the heyday of white middle class traditional families in the 1950's, there were cracks in the facade. The Rolling Stones, in their 1965 hit, *Mother's Little Helper*, poke holes in the supposed idyllic nature of this family structure when they recount the increasing popularity with housewives of the prescription tranquilizer diazepam.

Iconic shows of the 1960's, such as *The Brady Bunch* and *My Three Sons*, did not portray traditional families. *The Brady bunch* portrayed a blended family, where the father was a widower and the mother's status was left ambiguous--she may have been divorced. In *My Three Sons*, a widower raises his three boys.

The ground breaking 1970's show *All In the Family* tackled subjects long considered taboo on network TV, including racism, homosexuality, rape, impotence and breast cancer, to name a few. The show depicted a boomerang daughter and son-in-law living with her working class bigot father, Archie Bunker and her mother, Edith.

So we see that families have always come in many flavors. Let us celebrate those flavors. Let us celebrate single mothers and fathers, same-sex parents and grandmothers raising grandchildren. Let us celebrate families both traditional and not traditional that are built on love. Let us celebrate families that respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Let us celebrate parents and guardians who sometimes fall short, who do the best that they can. Let us celebrate the many, the village, who support our families in communities such as this one.

By Sophia Lyon Fahs: "For so the children come/And so they have been coming./Each night a child is born is a holy night--A time for singing,/ A time for wondering/ A time for worshipping."ⁱⁱ

Amen and Blessed Be

ⁱ <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/teachers/lesson1c.html> accessed 2/13/16

ⁱⁱ Sophia Lyon Fahs, #616 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.