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Baseline Paper

*My Personal Concept of Family*

In my personal understanding, a “family” is a group of beings that are connected by an unspoken pact to care, nurture, and learn from one another unconditionally for the rest of their lives. The reason I feel this way is because of my own upbringing. To be more specific, the two parts of my upbringing that greatly influence this personal understanding are my culture and where I grew up.

When speaking about my upbringing, one must understand that I was not raised by my immediate family alone. I was raised by a *community*. As an Irish, French, and Canadian Scottish “cradle Catholic”, I have spent extensive amounts of time at family gatherings with over 514 of my relatives. But my relatives were never simply present. My relatives were *involved*. Even if we didn’t know each other’s history very well, my relatives and I have always made a point to have open doors, arms, and ears for each other. I like to think that it’s because of the Catholic and Gaelic focus on community, which is known for being very large and very strong.

Even with such a large and strongly involved extended family my “small” immediate family of six people would have been enough to influence why I view “family” the way that I do. I have grown up in a heavily wooded area at the end of a 2 ½ mile long road. It takes 10 minutes to walk to my closest neighbor’s home and I can’t even see it for the first 8 minutes of walking. That’s nothing compared to how far away from town my home happens to be. Driving into town takes me 15 minutes at the minimum—2 to 3 hours if I choose to walk! That said, I am very secluded from the rest of my town and am, in turn, (sometimes) forced uncomfortably close to my parents and siblings. Living so far away from anyone else, we only have each other to rely on. Even if we don’t always want to, we have to rely on each other in order to survive so far away from the rest of society. That is our “unspoken pact” to one another.

Part of the reason why I say being a family is an “unspoken pact” is because of that idea that even when we don’t want to, as a family we still continue to rely on one another to care, nurture, and teach each other. Even if I don’t know a person very well, my culture has taught me to be welcoming to all. By welcoming everyone, I invite everyone to become a part of my family. After all, in the end my family is just a group of connected individuals. They include relatives related by birth, marriage, and official as well as unofficial adoption (i.e. close family friends). If you join us and follow our pact, we will never let you go because, to me, that’s what it means to be a “family”.