![MPj04393080000[1]]()**FAMILY LIFE: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE**

Read through the article and answer the corresponding questions on a separate piece of paper. Read the questions first so you know what to look for. Also, pay attention to the allocation of marks.

1. What is the most important lesson we can learn from the traditional family? (1 mark)
2. Define the concept of marriage (2 marks).
3. Provide an example of “social problems” that are considered by others to be normal behaviour. (1 marks)
4. Why did Aristotle condemn the women of Sparta? (2 marks)
5. What is meant by a non-punitive approach? (2 marks)
6. Provide 2 examples that today’s family is not that different from families in the past (2 marks)
7. What are two crimes that demand honour killing? (2 marks)
8. What were the aim of marriage and the goal of raising children? (2 marks)
9. What happened to the Asmat tribe when the government tried to modernize their way of life? (2 marks)
10. What did the legal changes with regards to divorce really reflect? (1 mark)
11. What “practical” approach to family problems turned catastrophic? (1 mark)

**ASSESSMENT**

Thinking = /9 marks

Application = /9 marks

Total = /18 marks

Level R \_\_\_\_ Level 1 \_\_\_\_ Level 2 \_\_\_\_ Level 3 \_\_\_\_ Level 4 \_\_\_\_

TRANSITION MAGAZINE
Winter 1999
VOL. 29 NO. 4

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**Family Life: Past, Present, Future** by **Donna McCloskey**

Sometimes you have to look back before you can move forwards. As Robert Glossop has said, "The building block of the future is a vision of the past."

With this issue of Transition— the last to be published in 1999—we hope to gain some historical perspective on families and family life before launching into a new century and a new millenium.

The magazine traces the path of family life—where we've been, where we are now and where we're going—with feature articles by Suanne Kelman (a professor at Ryerson's School of Journalism and author of All in the Family: A Cultural History of Family Life, Doug Owram (a professor of history at the University of Alberta and author of Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation), and Robert Glossop (Executive Director of Programs and Research, The Vanier Institute of the Family).

**Lessons from History: What the past can teach us about families today** by **Suanne Kelman**

The novelist L. P. Hartley opens his novel The Go-Between with the words, "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." When it comes to the family, that is particularly true. This century has transformed the way we mate and raise children in the West, and we tend to forget just how far we have strayed from our roots.

On the other hand, the past is merely foreign territory, not another planet. People differ enormously, but they remain human. Even in societies that have no use for romantic love—and many don't— individuals retain the capacity for it. No matter how earnestly the authorities advocate a harsh and detached approach to children, there have always been parents too loving to conform. We start life with the same desires, but different cultures channel them in very different ways.

Because historians have begun to turn their attention to the realm of private life and emotion, we now know a great deal about our collective past. What can we learn from the successes and failures of the millions of human beings who lived before us?

Lesson 1: There's no such thing as the traditional family.

The first and most important lesson is that we cannot look to the traditional family for guidance, simply because there is no single traditional family. The history of humanity offers just about every conceivable family type. The concept of marriage can embrace one man and multiple wives; one woman shared by multiple husbands, usually brothers; a monogamous couple (either heterosexual or homosexual); and even, in rare instances, a group of women and men. In some societies the custom is for a bride to move in with the groom's parents, or he may be expected to live with her parents and sisters. Or tradition may demand, as it does with us, that new couples form their own nuclear households. Despite what some radical critics believe, the nuclear, monogamous family is not a recent innovation. It's been present in some societies from the dawn of history.

This elasticity that humans have demonstrated through the centuries has relevance to our own age because many of the conditions we label social problems have constituted normal behaviour in other times and places. For example, Margaret Mead may have been wrong about the Samoans, but many groups-in the Pacific islands, in parts of Africa, and among some aboriginals here in North America-have encouraged sexual promiscuity among adolescents. A few cultures have always had higher divorce rates than ours today. And some Plains Indian tribes allowed homosexual marriage, placing particular value on the partner who took the female role, because he could do both male and female work.

Other societies have experienced changes like those of today, and were just as anxious about them. To take one obvious example, the hysteria over feminism and working mothers isn't new. Aristotle condemned the women of Sparta for living in comparative independence and controlling their state's financial affairs. A bit later, in 195 B.C., the consul Cato warned the men of Rome that women's rights were destroying the very fabric of society: "Suppose you allow them to acquire or to extort one right after another, and in the end to achieve complete equality with men, do you think that you will find them bearable? Nonsense. Once they have achieved equality, they will be your masters."

Permissive parenting is nothing new. When the first French missionaries arrived in Canada, they encountered tribes who never hit their children. Appalled by such indulgence, the priests worked hard to correct this heretical gentleness. A non-punitive approach to parenting is not exclusive to tribal cultures; other civilizations have followed our own pattern of moving from strict discipline to permissiveness. A 1930s historian wrote this devastating critique of the fathers of the late Roman Empire: "Having given up the habit of controlling their children, they let the children govern them, and took pleasure in bleeding themselves white to gratify the expensive whims of their offspring. The stem face of the traditional paterfamilias had faded out; instead we see the flabby face of the son of the house, the eternal spoiled child of society."

It may well be true that the children of the later Romans were spoiled rotten. Certainly the emperors Tiberius, Caligula and Nero turned out rather badly. But a tone of disapproving nostalgia seems to infect every society that knows how to write. In eighteenth-century Japan, writers scolded wives for adopting the fashions and manners of prostitutes, and young men for carelessly dissipating all the wealth their fathers had slaved to earn. Obviously we are not the first people on earth to grapple with a changing role for women a new freedom for children, or even a redefinition of marriage and family—although you wouldn't know it from most media reporting.

Lesson 2: Things could be worse!

So, there's not much point hearkening back to the good old days, because there weren't any. When we deplore the chaos and misery we see too often today, it is important not to colour the past with a rosy glow it never had. In many communities of the past—and in far too many of the present—customs demanded that children be raised with horrifying brutality.

Canadian filmmaker Gail Singer has made two movies about violence against women: Loved, Honoured and Bruised (1979) and You Can't Beat a Woman! (1997). In her research she was unable to find a culture—any culture—that had not experienced wife-beating. In Britain, historian Lawrence Stone points to cases where upper-class men kept their wives under control by threatening to place them, without cause, in insane asylumns—and some disenchanted husbands followed through on the threat.

There have been groups that forced men to sell their wives and children into slavery to pay debts. Untold numbers of female children have been sold or exposed to the elements. Even where illegal, the abandonment and murder of infants have sometimes been all too common. In some places, even now, any woman who dishonours her family can be killed by her husband's family—or sometimes by her own relatives. The crimes that demand such an honour killing include draping her veil carelessly, smiling at a man on the street, or simply arousing the suspicions of a paranoid husband or mother-in-law.

Many of the world's most persistent family traditions are disastrous for the individual and the society as a whole. China's traditional preference for male children, for example, now (combined with its draconian policies on population control, is guaranteed to deny marriage and fatherhood to huge numbers of the next generation of males. We know from history that the frustration of men in these circumstances can have truly terrible results.

Moreover, I see no evidence, outside the most primitive hunter-gatherer tribes, that people in the past were happier than we are. But then, in most places, for much of history, human happiness was not a major value. The purpose of marriage was not to share your life with someone you loved, nor was the goal of parenting to raise happy, well-adjusted children. Instead, the aim of marriage was to improve your larger family's economic lot and to produce legitimate children. The object in raising those children was to turn out adults who could help you survive and do credit to your name. If those goals resulted in misery for individuals in the family, no one much cared.

This makes some sense if we remember that life for much of history has been very hard. Suffering may well have numbed sensitivity. Until about 250 years ago, people died very young indeed. Death, especially in war and child birth, played the role that divorce does for us, leaving the widowed to raise their offspring as single parents.

Lesson 3. Legislating family life is a slippery slope.

Different cultures have dealt with social "problems" such as single parents in different ways. Some forced widows to remarry, through religious or state edicts. But such laws tend to lose their force over time. For here's the third lesson: it is usually futile and often dangerous to try to legislate changes in family life.

In the 1970s, the government of Indonesia decided to modernize the ways of a tribe called the Asmat, an easy-going group living in extended families of up to 200 people. Indonesia decreed that henceforth the Asmat must live in separate, nuclear households. The alteration proved disastrous. Without the co-operative daycare system of their old pattern, Asmat women could no longer leave their children to go fishing. Married couples, hungry and no longer separated while working during the day, grew fractious and bored with each other.

The Asmat example is an extreme one, but legislated change often backfires. In the baby bust of the post-pill era, several Communist governments—notably Romania's—banned birth control and abortion. The result was a flood of abandoned children-far too many for the State to cope with humanely.

Attempts to mold the family from without are just as likely to have no effect whatsoever. The emperor Augustus passed two series of laws aimed at forcing more Romans to marry and reproduce. (Augustus, a great advocate of moral family life, had three wives in succession, two of them divorced from other husbands. His children and step-children included some of the greatest villains in the history of the human race.) Augustus' efforts failed and, like us, the Romans still had to cope with a large number of single citizens.

Augustus failed in part because Romans came to love property more than children and marriage. (I fear there may be another lesson for us here.) Imperial conquest brought wealth to Rome, and wealth seemed to stimulate greed. In the words of the historian Gerald L. Leslie, "Both men and women married for financial gain or they married not at all." They were just as unenthusiastic about reproduction.

We might remember the debacle of late Roman family life when we're tempted to tinker with our own legal framework. I'm hearing calls today, for instance, to tighten Canadian divorce laws. It's true that our divorce rates soared after the laws were liberalized in 1968 and 1985, but the rate was already rising and the legal changes simply reflected an undeniable social reality. In a world where women can earn their own living, and where we place such a premium on personal fulfillment, it's impossible to imagine laws that could keep unhappy couples together.

Lesson 4: There's no predicting how people will turn out.

We have to keep in mind that there is no simple cause-and-effect pattern in family life. If there were, we wouldn't encounter so much conflicting advice about how to have a good marriage, or how to raise children successfully. I recently watched Michael Apted's documentary '35 Up," one of a series following a group of British children from different backgrounds at seven year intervals. Different things strike me each time I see one of these documentaries. This time I noticed that the three fatherless boys raised in a bleak and unloving institution seem to have grown up into exceptionally devoted and involved fathers. They are a heartening example of human resilience, and a reminder that we can't predict how people will tum out. Now, to my mind that's a bad change, because early childbirth can harm a woman's health. But then, as I hope I've demonstrated, the approach to family affairs in all cultures is often irrational.

For a while, fairly recently, we thought we could. In my book, All in the Family, I cite the notorious example of the lk, a Ugandan tribe described by anthropologist Colin Turnbull in The Mountain People. Since losing the right to hunt when their territory became a game reserve m 1958, the Ik have become the symbol of an equation: persistent hunger leads to brutality and anarchy. After visiting them during a drought, Turnbull described a family structure in chaos, with mothers abandoning their young at the age of three, bands of children snatching food from the weak and aged, and every man's hand turned against his neighbours. When he returned a year after the drought ended, the Ik had a food surplus from abundant crops and yet, he wrote, their vicious ways persisted.

Based on Turnbull's description, many of us predicted that the Ik would never be able to travel back to anything like normal behaviour. Surprisingly, though, when other anthropologists visited the Ik recently, they found a normal, co-operative communal life. It's likely that Turnbull exaggerated considerably, but if the Ik did go through a couple of decades of vilely anti-social behaviour, they must have shaped up since.

Lesson 5: Family life keeps changing.

And that brings us to the final lesson: family life is in a constant state of change, even in cultures that look unshakably stable. The self-indulgent laxity of the later Romans proved fertile ground for Christianity, a profoundly anti-materialist religion preaching self-discipline in sexual and family life. Similarly, in many parts of Africa today, indigenous ways are yielding to the more puritanical influence of Islam. An anthropologist tells me that Somali girls today are being married off at a much younger age than their mothers or grandmothers, as Somali men want to imitate marriages they saw while working in Arab states.

I think what we can learn from the past is that we should ignore the hysteria many critics bring to a discussion of family life today. Yes, things could be better but, as I've shown, they have often been far worse. We also need to acknowledge our emotions, while using our minds. Purely practical approaches to family problems have consistently proven catastrophic—as evidenced by Canada's residential schools that took native children away from their families. However, purely emotional reactions are equally unfortunate. We are not going to find perfect answers for every family, but that fact shouldn't stop us from grappling with the realities facing us. If we can recognize the impossibility of returning to a past we never had, we can get going-carefully, intelligently and compassionately—on improving the future.

Suanne Kelman is a professor of journalism at Ryerson Polytechnic University. She has produced documentaries on love, relationships and marriage for the CBC Radio show "Ideas," and is the author of All in the Family: A Cultural History of Family Life (Penguin, 1998).

Quick Facts About Canadians Today

* Nearly four out of five Canadians were born in Canada. People who immigrated to this country make up 17% of the population—a total of close to 5 million people.
* Among families with children, those with two parents increased from three to four million in the last quarter of the twentieth century. But at the same time, the **proportion** of all families that have two parents and children dropped from 87% in 1971 to 78% in 1996. Meanwhile, the proportion of lone-parent families grew from 14% of all families with children to 22%.
* Only 2.7% of all households, or 208,000 family homes have three generations living together. And yet, almost a third of Canadians 15 and older have a living grandparent, most often a grandmother.
* About 12.2% of Canada's population is 65 years of age or older. A hundred years ago, no more than 5% of the nation's population was over 65.

—from the new edition of VIF's popular Profiling Canada's Families, to be published in 2000. (1996 information)

**The Family at Mid-Century** by **Doug Owram**

What is it about the post-World-War-II family that puts it at the centre of the family-values question so hotly debated by left- and right-wing forces? Did the post-war family have some inherent virtue that, if lovingly restored, would be the cure-all for the ills of contemporary Canadian society? Instead of arguing on one side of the debate or the other, it might be worthwhile to revisit what we know about this notorious family, the unprecedented forces that created it, and those that brought about its undoing.

The post-war family is surrounded by popular myths. Representative of this mythology is many of the images our society inherited from early television. "Leave It to Beaver" and "Father Knows Best" portrayed the ideal nuclear family with working father, understanding mother and lively but loving children. There is also a darker story however that descends from the second wave of feminism and from critics of the suburban wasteland. It is the story of isolated housewives and commuting husbands surrounded by tick-tacky houses and an ethic of competitive consumerism.

Though it may seem obvious, it should be stressed that the Canadian family at mid-century was in most ways a unit that had evolved slowly over the generations. As a piece of history, it had certain characteristics that seemed unassailable at the time but would prove surprisingly vulnerable within the next generation. The most important of these was the fact that the mid-century family was based on the principle that marriage is a sacred as well as a social institution.

Marriage was forever and marriage was expected of adults. Canadian law reinforced this social value, and anyone seeking a divorce confronted significant legal hurdles. In the immediate post-war years, divorces surged as returned soldiers and their wives found that their feelings had changed. Thereafter, however, stability won out. Divorce rates in the 1950s were remarkably constant, with only about one in twenty marriages ending in divorce. (By the 1970s, with a more liberal divorce law, the rate would rise to one in five.) Though most people probably knew somebody who was divorced, the expectation was that married couples remained married. Those who did not were generally seen as failures, whatever the reasons for the breakup.

Another significant aspect of the evolution of the Canadian family was that by the post-war era it had adapted to an urban environment. For people in cities and towns, as well as for many farm families, the notion of a self-contained unit in which work, child-rearing and production all co-mingled was the stuff of pioneer legend. Income generation occurred outside the home, and children were no longer engaged directly in earning money for the family.

Similarly, the family had surrendered a large part of its educational role to the state-run school, except in more isolated communities. Compulsory education now ran to the age of 16, and the average level of education had been increasing throughout the first half of the century. By mid-century the role of formal education was much more important than it had been even a few years before. It was only after World War II that the majority of Canadian children attended high school. For the first time the formal educational system ran through adolescence not just for the elite but for the average person.

As education moved out of the home, so too did dozens of other functions. Slowly but surely a whole range of family activities were becoming professionalized. Each year fewer people depended on home production for clothes, fresh vegetables or even baked goods. Instead, efficient production and distribution systems—not to mention advertising—furnished cheap products that made home production increasingly the preserve of the hobbyist. Wonder Bread may not have been as tasty as home baking but it was convenient, economical and seemed never to go stale!

The absence of educational and production roles led many commentators to question the role of the modern family. If it didn't educate and it wasn't a unit of production, what was it? Increasingly, there was even a fear that the most basic of all the family functions—reproduction—was fading away due to the pressures of the modern world.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the birth rate in Canada had begun to fall. Initially the trend had been slow and regionally uneven. While Ontario's declining rate can be traced back to the 1880s, the prairie West remained a land of many children until after World War I, and in Quebec the change came even later. However, as early as the 1920s the national pattern was clear and seemingly irreversible. The crude birth rate (births per thousand population) was down to 25 by the 1920s and by 1935 down to 20. At this level the population was barely reproducing itself. Urbanization and depression had finally put Canada on a path that Europe had entered some decades earlier.

A study commissioned by the reputable Dominion Bureau of Statistics in the early forties predicted only the smallest population increase through the next three decades and then a slow decline in population! If this prediction had been correct, Canada today would have fewer than 20 million people, instead of more than 30 million.

On the other side of the equation, improvements in medicine led to a steady decline in infant mortality through the same decades. In the early 1920s one child in ten died in their first year of life. By the end of World War II that was down to one in twenty, and by 1955 one in thirty. Antibiotics, hospital births and inoculation had accomplished much.

The combination of a declining birth rate and improved infant survival fundamentally changed the nature of the family. At the turn of the century the "typical" family would have had a large number of children, but not all would live to adulthood. A woman expected to spend a good percentage of the years between her wedding and menopause bearing children. By the post-World-War-II years the typical family had fewer children but their chances of survival had increased greatly. The social and psychological impact of these changes was enormous.

As the century moved on, women spent much less of their time being pregnant and taking care of infants. This opened up new possibilities that would become fundamental to society and politics in the post-war years. As well, parents could be less reserved in their attachment to children who were likely to survive. The presence of fewer but less vulnerable children allowed families to make a greater emotional, economic and time investment in each individual child.

Changing demographics and mortality rates worked in tandem with shifting social attitudes and economic conditions to slowly alter the nature of the family itself. Many of these changes required a full generation after the war to be integrated fully into the family structure and outlook. Nonetheless, powerful forces were grinding away at the mid-century family even as it took shape. Thus any portrait must be seen as transitory.

Theories about the relationship between families, individuals and society proved almost as powerful as elemental demo-graphic forces in molding the mid-century family. There was, for example, a strong post-war belief that the nature of the state and the nature of the family were closely linked. I discuss this at some length in my study of the baby boom but, in essence, the argument went something like this. The horrors of Nazi Germany and the oppressive measures of Stalinist Russia had starkly demonstrated how easily a modern society could fall into dictatorship. Especially troublesome was Germany, where the people turned away from the democratic Weimar republic and willingly accepted a ruthless dictator.

Why would a modern industrial people undertake this "flight from freedom," as Erich Fromm put it? The answer, some mid-century writers concluded, lay in the family. An authoritarian family (and supporting structures such as authoritarian schools) created a habit of mindless obedience. As marriage expert Henry Bowman concluded in 1948, the struggle between authoritarian and democratic ways of life had not ended with the Second World War: "Marriage and family, too, are caught in the maelstrom. They are passing from a form roughly paralleling. dictatorship and government by force to a democratic form of organization."

Related to this were the popularization of psychology, and the unprecedented degree to which best-selling authors on child-rearing, marriage and family life incorporated a loose form of Freudian analysis into their writing. Child expert Benjamin Spock, for example, absorbed and passed on notions of "the integration of personality," "the ego" and "the id" in his assessment of the modern family's needs. Of course, only some parents read such books and fewer still applied the theories, but the late 1940s and 50s were nevertheless tremendously influenced by psychological trends.

The age conveyed the idea that the human mind was a powerful but fragile vessel. The wrong messages or behaviour could fracture that vessel with dire consequences to the individual, family and friends, and society itself. Also in line with Freudian theory, that vessel was seen to be most vulnerable when being formed—in childhood. For the Freudian—as with many other schools of psychology—basic values, patterns of behaviour and even sexual identity took shape in the first years. Here was when the child learned love or rejection, trust or distrust, democracy or authoritarianism. Parents who made seemingly small mistakes might, in fact, be condemning the child to unknown but serious social problems in the future. In such a world, being a parent was no trivial exercise.

Intruding on these family structures and beliefs was the famous baby boom. It shredded demographic presumptions and ensured that for many years the focus on children and youth would dominate North American culture. The declining birth rate had begun to reverse itself during World War II but it was not until the war ended that something really unusual happened. The idealization of family during depression and war, followed by the prosperity of a strong post-war economy, all contributed to an unexpected and long-lasting increase in the number of children born in Canada.

From 300,000 births in 1945, the number of babies rose steadily, peaking at just under 480,000 in 1959. During that time the crude birth rate per thousand also rose, from 24 to 27. The numbers remained high until changing values and the availability of the pill brought decline in the mid-1960s. Nothing like the baby boom had been experienced in modern history and it is unlikely to be experienced again.

The mid-century boom did not take us back to the era of large families and endless pregnancy. Instead, a new pattern emerged. The number of children per family remained relatively small, with most families having no more than three. However, underlying the boom were two trends: a "marriage boom" that saw a higher percentage of the population getting married and doing so at a younger age; and a decline in the number of no-child families. The typical mid-century family was one where husband and wife married in their early twenties, had two or three children relatively quickly, and then spent their thirties and forties raising them.

The boom ensured that children and youth remained at the centre of social issues, which further reinforced existing tendencies to a child-dominated family structure. Indeed, the phrase "filiocracy" was coined by William Whyte in 1956 to describe a world in which the needs and wishes of children seem to be paramount. Whyte intended the term as a point of criticism aimed at thousands of suburbanite families. Here was an early statement of the notion that the baby boomers were a spoiled generation—and an extremely perceptive comment on the social reality of the day. This was a society and a family structure built around children.

The filiocracy reinforced many existing social mores. Divorce reform was unlikely at a time when society believed a family breakup would harm the children. Politicians hastened to invest in education, as the number of new pre-schoolers grew by the thousands every year and parents clamoured for a better educational system. Manufacturers and marketers soon developed a whole new range of toys and even new industries to satisfy the consuming power of children.

Democratic theories of the family fit well into such a child-oriented society. Benjamin Spock was so successful because his book mixed current notions with a calming sense of reassurance for the average parent. He also reassured society that the new, relaxed attitude toward children would work out because a child was a "reasonable, friendly human being."

The impact of all this on the role of women is more complex. On the one hand, society dearly supported the notion that a child needed a mother at home, at least during the early years. As late as 1960, fewer than 5% of Canadians thought it acceptable for a mother to work outside the home while her children were growing up. On the other hand, the emphasis on the new generation, and the prosperity of the post-war years, ultimately undermined traditional roles. Female education levels caught up with those of males as baby-boom girls expected and received levels of education that would have been highly unusual even a decade or so before. Sustained prosperity made it easier for these same women to enter the labour force and, once there, to assert that traditional restrictions and discrimination should end.

It might be argued that initially the emphasis on family and children held women to a domestic ideal in the midst of the rhetoric of democracy and opportunity. Yet, in the long run, the very role that these women played within the family helped create a generation of daughters and sons who would not accept restriction.

The complex forces that affected women's roles are mirrored in the fate of the mid-century family as a whole. In the first phase, the tremendous orientation to children and domesticity accentuated the idea that there was just one standard family to be celebrated and sustained: a wage-earning father and a housewife mother with 2.5 children, all living together in a suburban house, within an atmosphere of give-and-take. However, the very notions of democracy and freedom, and the very emphasis on generation and youth, eventually undermined the assumption that the standard mid-century family was the only appropriate model.

Belief in the importance of individual fulfillment challenged the dominance of family harmony as early as the sixties. By the time another decade had passed, new divorce laws, a declining birth rate and changing sexual attitudes meant that new visions of family could emerge. Single parenthood, same-sex marriages, one-child families and no-child families all became much more common and accepted. Today there is no longer a single standard for what a family should be, as many different voices speak out on what is right, appropriate, and realistic. Yet, amidst all the change, the word "family" evokes as many powerful emotions as it ever did.

Doug Owram is a professor of history, as well as Vice-President (Academic) and Provost, at the University of Alberta. His book, Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation, was published in 1996 by the University of Toronto Press.

Quick Facts about Marriage & Divorce

* Almost nine out of ten Canadian couples are married, but more unmarried couples are living together than ever before. In the last decade of the twentieth century, the number of legally married people increased by less than 1%. Over the same period, the number of people in a common-law union increased by 26%. Perhaps surprisingly, more seniors than teenagers live common law. (1996 information)
* In the 1950s, more than four out of every ten women were married by the age of 22. By 1996, only about one in ten was married before the age of 25.
* Eight percent of Canadians are separated or divorced. People in Newfoundland are the least likely to be separated or divorced: the rate there is only half the national average. Yukon has the highest rate, at 10%. The other provinces vary from 5% to 9%. (1996 information)

—from the new edition of VIF's popular Profiling Canada's Families, to be published in 2000.

**Families—Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow** by **Robert Glossop**

I was born in 1947, along with another 372,588 Canadians. No one knew it then, but we were at the leading edge of what it would be called the baby boom—an unprecedented period of population growth that would last almost two decades. Those of us born at mid-century can remember when:

* Homes had only one telephone, either in the kitchen or the front hall, and it was always black, with a rotary dial;
* We had to share a room with a brother or sister;
* We were thrilled to be introduced to a new member of the family: television, the big box that would make conversation and games practically obsolete;
* We enjoyed Sunday drives in the family car because there was little else to do on "the Lord's Day";
* Our parents struggled to put money aside for a rainy day, and only then would they think about buying a hi-fi—paying cash of course;
* We celebrated with our parents when they made their final mortgage payment;
* Parents were afraid their children would die, or be disabled or disfigured by smallpox, scarlet fever or polio;
* Grandma and grandpa dropped by regularly;
* Jobs lasted a lifetime;
* Couples were expected to get married **before** they made babies;
* Marriages lasted a lifetime.

Back then, according to Doug Owram, "The main goal of youth was to get married. The main goal of adults was to stay happily married." If a young woman had not yet tied the knot by the age of 23, she and her family would begin to worry that she might be doomed to spinsterhood for life.

In 1946, the marriage rate had reached an all-time high. The vast majority of brides and grooms came from the same social religion and ethnic tradition. When a young woman got married, it was assumed that she would be a homemaker, devoted to supporting her husband in his role as breadwinner, and bearing and raising the two to four children they wanted. The essential role of parents was to love and take care of their children, which they did with abundant advice and encouragement from the cadre of family and parenting professionals. And, with advances in medical care, these babies were far more likely to survive infancy and childhood than any previous generation.

Early each morning, men left home—often a bungalow in the suburbs—to drive to work in the city. Suburban communities were populated almost exclusively by women and children throughout the day. In the evening, the family would retreat the pressures of Dad's work day and the kids' school day to their haven in a heartless world (maintained and managed by Mom, whose work was never done). Together they sat staring at the television, with their dinners balanced precariously on folding TV trays.

For families at mid-century, the future looked both promising and predictable. Surely the unprecedented affluence that was fueling rising expectations and ambitions would continue indefinitely. And surely the way of our parents’ generation had carved out would be the way of life we baby-boomers would emulate when it came time to start our own families.

But, times do change. In the second half of the twentieth century:

* The baby bust followed the baby boom, as boomers chose not to replicate the large families from which we sprang. In fact, we haven't even produced enough children to replace ourselves;
* Co-habitation became an acceptable precursor to marriage;
* The divorce rate increased five-fold;
* The dual-wage-earning family emerged as the norm;
* Parents became "crunched" for time as they juggled the often competing obligations of jobs and families;
* Couples of the same sex gained increasing recognition and respect.

The families of today have been transformed by these and other important social changes;

* Couples typically live together before—or instead of—getting married;
* One in every three women raises children on her own for at least part of her life;
* At any one time, twenty percent of Canada's children are living in families with insufficient incomes;
* Violence and abuse have been unveiled as the shadow side of family life for all too many Canadians.

As the sons and daughters of baby-boomers come of age, they are confronted by a bewildering array of choices and responsibilities unimagined by their parents or grandparents. Their memories are different from ours:

* They had their own bedroom, with a phone in the colour and style of their choice;
* The Commodore 64 computer—soon to be followed by upgrades, Pentium processors and the Internet-introduced them to video games they could play entirely by themselves;
* On Sundays they borrowed one of the family cars to drive to a mall;
* They talked to grandma and grandpa by phone or e-mail on birthdays and holidays;
* They learned from their parents that you can buy anything you want on credit—a new vehicle or a Walkman, a microwave oven or a satellite dish;
* They wanted to get their own place after finishing university but had to start paying back their student loans instead;
* They learned about HIV/AIDS, STDs and so-called safe sex;
* They lived through their parents' separation, or saw their friends' parents break up.

Memories like these, along with their own family biography provide the backdrop of facts and impressions against which today's and tomorrow's young adults will decide questions such as: Do I want to make a life-long commitment to a partner? If so, does it need to be sanctioned by Church and State? Do I want kids? How many? Should I be married first? Should I leave my partner? and If my first relationship doesn't last, will I try again —and maybe even start a second family?

In short, how the lives of men, women and children unfold is today less predictable than in the past, as we pursue and shape destinies that are more individualized, less scripted by the expectations of our own parents, the conventions of faith, or the sanctions of law. To be sure, our aspirations and hopes are still influenced by other people but more often they are influenced by the messages of an economy that depends on individuals more **than** on families. A culture of "expressive individualism" has replaced notions of duty, sacrifice and conformity with aspirations for self-expression, pleasure and acceptance of differences.

As some wit once observed, it is unfortunately the case that all of our knowledge is about the past, while all of our decisions are about the future. This being the case, how can we even attempt to discern the contours of family life in the new millennium? The example of experts who failed to predict first the baby boom and then the baby bust provide ample warning that we need to be cautious as we try to anticipate the landscape of the future, a place where no one has ever been.

To be sure, we will continue to see and acknowledge many different kinds of families: married and common-law heterosexual couples with and without children, lone-parent and two-parent families; same-sex couples with and without children; single-earner and dual-earner families; blended families with various configurations of step-relationships; adoptive and foster families. And of course tomorrow's families, like today's, will come in various colours and with many different ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions, as Canada continues its long dependence on immigrants to support its population.

One change that will become more and more noticeable in our families and communities will be the aging of our population. In part the consequence of the baby-boom generation's unwillingness to bear as many children as our parents and grandparents did, the rising proportion of seniors will become especially conspicuous when we boomers begin to turn 65. In the meantime, we need to confront the challenges that an aging society presents, finding better ways of investing in our children and grandchildren while still acknowledging our debt to those who invested in us.

Beneath the surface of these patterns of diversity and change, the essential roles of families will be evident as we strive to provide for ourselves and our loved ones and to endow future generations with the values, knowledge and opportunities that will be Canada's foundation in the twenty-first century. As we baby-boomers age, we will be more than a little curious to see how well our children and grandchildren will remember and value the legacy we pass on to them.

Time together is the essential resource that family members use to weave the biographies of their individual members together into meaningful lives lived with and for others. And yet, as we look forward to the next millennium, time seems to be the scarcest of all resources. The whole question of time undergirds so many family issues that our lack of it will have to be carried forward from the ledger of 1999 as the opening entry on the Year 2000 books.

Mothers and fathers, each now expected to be both breadwinner and involved parent, struggle to balance the often competing demands of jobs and homes. Many of those who are fortunate enough to have a secure and meaningful job are feeling pressured to work longer and longer hours. Some need to find the time to care not only for themselves and their children, but also for elderly parents who may be lonely or disabled.

Citizens in a hurried and harried culture are hard-pressed to find the time to get involved in the communities and civic institutions that support the health and vitality of their own—and their neighbours'—families. Together, the many demands on our time constitute a contemporary crisis of care that will challenge Canadians in the next century to find fair and effective ways to care for every citizen.

Money is the other resource that most families feel is in short supply. Like governments and businesses, families have to balance their budgets. Compared with the immediate post-war years, we live within a society and economy that compel us to devote a larger share of our family-time budget to earning money in the labour force.

Today, if you earn the average wage and want to sustain the level of expenditure now typical of Canada's families, you have to work 77 weeks a year! For a family with more than one wage earner this is not as impossible as it sounds, but it means that many couples do not have the option of letting one of them stay home to care for their children. For lone-parent families, and for couples who can't find enough work that pays at least an average wage, it can be very difficult to maintain an acceptable standard of living. Particularly affected are displaced older workers, and the many young people competing for the few decent entry-level positions available in our current labour market.

While it is still true that a job is the best safeguard against poverty, it is increasingly the case that families need two jobs to provide an effective foundation of income adequacy and long-term financial security. Over the last quarter of a century", the number of families counting on two wages to make ends meet has increased dramatically from about three in ten to seven in ten. This being the case, we have to acknowledge that the emergence of the dual-wage-earning family as the norm has occasioned many of the issues confronting Canadians at the end of the century—issues that decision-makers often dismiss as family issues but which are really economic or social issues.

Despite the clear and compelling research evidence that the quality of the first years of life is a crucial determinant of a child's development and prospects, we enter the next century with the child care crisis unresolved and with little evidence of public or political will to address it. At the other end of the age spectrum, the care of elderly Canadians looms on the horizon as the next crisis of care.

Many look to a revitalized civic society in response to the contraction of the welfare state, yet most simply assume that citizens have the time and energy necessary to re-vitalize our communities. However, we cannot simply turn on "a thousand points" of civic light without first rebuilding the foundations of the lives we live together in our homes, our communities and our nation.

Kinship once served as the central foundation of social order. A person was known as the son or daughter of so-and-so; their parents' place in the community determined how well they would be able to provide for themselves. Over the course of the twentieth century, Canadians have created a social order that, for very good reasons, no longer rewards or restricts us on the basis of our lineage. Instead, we are acknowledged for our individual accomplishments—educational, professional, financial, athletic, political or what have you. For half a century, our society has valued individual autonomy, achievement and choice, downplaying the traditional bonds to family, employer, community and country.

Most of us would not now choose, even if we could, to turn the clocks back and restrict our hopes and ambitions to those that we inherit. And yet, we have paid a price for our individual freedoms and aspirations. We have, in a sense, purchased our individualism at the expense of our family life, our marriages, the safety of our streets, our relationships with neighbours and, ultimately, at the expense of knowing what purposes we share with others. Having chosen to chart our own course and lead lives that are very different from those of our parents, many of us find ourselves more isolated, and shouldering a greater share of responsibility for our own lives, than people did in the past. We approach the beginning of a new millennium in a state of personal stress, financial indebtedness, perpetual insecurity and fragile personal relationships.

In the next century, when pollsters ask future generations about their values, they will ahnost certainly say their families are more important than anything else, just as past and present generations have said. The real question, then, is whether or not the commitments we make as a society and culture will serve to acknowledge, support and reinforce the commitments that individuals are willing to make to one another in the context of family. More specifically,

* Will we commit to policies and programs that acknowledge families as the foundations of our lives?
* Will we structure an economy that provides financial security and adequate resources to families?
* Will our tax system acknowledge that parents raising children have less disposable income with which to pay taxes?
* Will we provide some measure of tangible support to those who take care of children (the caregivers of the future) and the elderly (the caregivers of the past)?
* Will we acknowledge that parents cannot do it all on their own and that the care and upbringing of children is, and always has been, a collective responsibility?
* Will we expand parents' range of choices by funding parenting and family resource programs, a high-quality and affordable system of childcare, and longer periods of parental leave?
* Will our housing policies help families realize the traditional goal of owning a home?
* Will employers respect and accommodate employees' family responsibilities, realizing that wanting to provide for their family is precisely what motivates most people to do well on the job?

As we seek answers to these and other questions in the twenty-first century, one thing is certain. Contrary to some popular opinion, there is a future for the family. Canadians will continue to commit ourselves to others in search of the love, security and connection that unite us to the past and commit us to the future.

Robert Glossop, Ph.D., is Executive Director of Programs and Research for The Vanier Institute of the Family.