

FAMILY TIES



Why are family bonds so strong? Let's start at the beginning, TARNYA DAVIS writes.

A FUNERAL is one of those rare emotionally real situations where the complexities of the bond called family can be witnessed. At a friend's mum's funeral, the love shown by his mother's siblings in her gigantic family of origin was palpable. Theirs was a very difficult childhood, and it was evident that, in childhood as at the end of life, their loyalty to each other was everything. No matter her flaws, they loved her unconditionally.

Families are more often than not the cause of pain - conflict, hurt, rejection, blame and favouritism. Yet, despite these landmines, the bond of those who know us from the beginning is sometimes enough to make us work at love and forgiveness beyond anything we would offer a friend or acquaintance.

As pointed out by The School of Life, there is an emotional nepotism that comes with family. Regardless of our successes or failures, our strengths or weaknesses, we are (or hope to be) loved and cared for, regardless. It's this sense of belonging that is deeply important and why it's the more exceptional situation where a family member becomes estranged, unlike the common experience of being excluded from a workplace, or a friendship group, for example.

Although we meet people and connect with them as adults, and these are the people who know us and live our 'now', there is a particular knowing when it comes to our childhood and its impact on who we are, that can only best be understood by those who were there. It was this knowing I saw in the siblings' grief-worn faces last week.

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