

Chapter One

A Family of Affinity

By its dominant voices, its most unforgettable faces, and its chief acts of bravery does a generation recognize itself and history mark it.

—ERIC SEVAREID, American journalist

WHAT IS THIS thing we call “family” and what are its characteristics? I define a family as two or more people who by either genetic lineage or bonds of affinity consider themselves related to each other. The core of my philosophy is my belief that a family that sees itself as linked not only by blood but by affinity and acts from that philosophical base has the greatest chance of successfully enhancing the individual development and growth of its members and thus of dynamically preserving the family as a whole for at least five generations. Families who see themselves principally as linked by genetic lineage, or by blood, rarely if ever, in my experience, overcome the proverb.

Paradoxically, most families define themselves by blood alone and not also by affinity. Regardless of popular sentiment for such a definition, I have repeatedly found that a family that defines itself in this way closes its systems to new members from outside the family. These outsiders represent the new energy the family needs to overcome what it will lose by natural attrition. A family of affinity maintains open systems that welcome new members, giving the family a better chance of survival.