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MY VIEW ANNE DOHERTY

## New Mexico needs its own Family Month

By Anne Doherty

Apr 26, 2024

A year ago, I stumbled down an internet rabbit hole that led me to research whether the United States had a national family month. It turned out that back in 1998, Congress fell short of a full resolution, merely acknowledging Family Month as existing between Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Last year, President Joe Biden signed something that labels the week of Thanksgiving as Family Week. But in either case, no one knows about it, let alone celebrates it — meanwhile, the Canadians get a full day off to celebrate the family every February.

This got me thinking how unifying an actual full-fledged state or national Family Month would be in these divisive times. It would help us acknowledge that we're all just human beings, who all came into the world in roughly the same way. Whether we like — or even know — our biological parents is less important than embracing the story of one's existence and recognizing that each and every person has a unique story, and with that, a unique purpose. More than that, it would remind us that our survival depends on those who came before us. Parents tend to pay it forward, and shouldn't everyone?

I've lived abroad and in several U.S. cities. New Mexico, more than any place I've lived, treasures family and family heritage. How can you not when your connection to the land goes back 500, or 2000-plus, years? (The same is true in much of Canada, where they value First Nations cultures.) In New Mexico, I've met many people who not only personally care for their aging parents or dying family members, they also feel honor bound to do so. The crosses or other markers at roadsides show the place where the soul of a loved one left the Earth — and this spot is remembered by the surviving family. Yet, New Mexico is a poor state, and poverty, drugs and crime put enormous pressure on families to stay together.

So, how wonderful if New Mexico were to adopt its own Family Month and use it as an opportunity to strengthen what it already does best. To that end, I've created a website: [familymonthproject.com](http://familymonthproject.com), which explains the vision behind Family Month and includes ideas to celebrate and, if needed, ways to heal.

When I first came up with the idea, I shared it with someone who said her stepson wouldn't celebrate family. "Family is a controversial word," she said. "Really?" I thought, "When everybody has one?" In today's world we so often cater to people who might be offended, yet celebrating family might just be the reminder we all need to treat each other better and perhaps acknowledge the hurt we've done or received. Study psychology, and you will discover that family trauma is the greatest trauma. I myself struggled to forgive my own family members for years — until one day a visitor to my home asked why I displayed no pictures of my ancestors. She said it was important to see such pictures because, "we can't know where we're going until we appreciate where we've been."

Between Mother's Day and Father's Day this year, celebrate your family, yourself and your own family story. Get in touch with distant or aging relatives and learn their story before they slip away. Give the kiddos a chuckle with fading photos or scratchy videos that show off your dated hair and clothes. Create new memories with a picnic or movie night. You'll feel grounded and satisfied after doing so. Sharing where you've been, you'll see more clearly where you want to go.

*Anne Doherty works as a hypnotherapist in Santa Fe. She has a husband of 37 years and two adult children.*