

Family, the tie that binds

By Grace Miller

Special to Amish Heartland

Family is central to the Amish way of life. Family relationships are strong cords that bind the community together.

Adult children do not lightly or

easily decide to move away from the place of their birth.

The ideal situation,

to the Amish way of thinking, is one in which sons and daughters grow up, marry a member of the same congregation or neighborhood and settle down in a home near enough for their children to have daily contact with grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins.

When Melvin Hochstetler* married Esther Keim in 1973, they were already well acquainted. Melvin and Esther are third cousins, and Melvin's brother is married to a relative of Esthers. Esther is the youngest daughter of a widowed mother, so after the wedding the

couple moved into the farm home where Esther and her siblings had been raised.

At first, Melvin worked for a relative in the building trade, but after two years, he had enough moneysavedforadownpaymentand

agreed to buy the farm from his mother-in-law. In the meantime, children had begun

to arrive, a daughter, who is now married and lives two miles away with her growing family— and their son, who is also raising a family and works for a furniture maker nearby.

There were times when Melvin felt that his mother-in-law was offering too many opinions about how he was handling the farm, and he did wish for more independence. His children and their grandmother have always had a close relationship, but there were also occasions when the noise of the boisterous group of children became too much for

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