

Happy Mother's Day

by SHERALYN ROMAN

There are special days we mark on the calendar, some courtesy of Hallmark and others courtesy of a long-standing tradition of recognizing the contributions of others in our lives. Mothers' Day is probably a result of both, but nonetheless an excellent reason to remind our mothers of the incredible influence they have had on our lives ? and, if we are lucky, that influence was a good one and we are in a position to thank them for it. If you've somehow missed all the advertising in the big lead up to this special day and you are reading this column on Friday night or Saturday morning, it's not too late. Stop what you're doing right now and plan instead to do something nice for your mother on Sunday!

According to Google, the "font of all knowledge," which by the way, is one of the many titles mothers can also lay claim to, we have been honouring mothers since the dawn of time. Pagan traditions included ceremonies honouring mothers, the Greeks and Romans honoured Rhea, Mother of the Gods and Cybele, Great Mother of the Gods, and in Europe various forms of "Mothering Sunday" have been observed since the 1600s. Indigenous cultures have long recognized women and mothers as the foundation of family and community, as keepers of cultural knowledge and traditions, and as healers and wisdom holders.

More recently, the last two hundred years has seen the emergence of a more commercialized approach to celebrating the day, although that was not necessarily its original aim. The initial impetus began with a woman named Julia Ward Howe, "in response to the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War" when she wrote a proclamation calling "on women to use their position as mothers to influence society in fighting for an end to all wars." To me, that certainly sounds like something a mother would do.

Building on the work started by Howe, another mother named Ann Reeves Jarvis, in the years leading up to the Civil War, had helped to start "Mothers' Day Work Clubs" teaching local women how to properly care for their children. Later, "these clubs " became a unifying force in a region of the country still divided over the Civil War," so in 1868 Jarvis followed up her efforts by organizing "Mothers' Friendship Day." It was a day "at which mothers gathered with former Union and Confederate soldiers to promote reconciliation."

Once again arising as a way to heal from war, it seems to me like Mother's Day (at least here in North America) originally began as a "women to the rescue," operation, with moms trying to repair, rebuild and reconcile differences. Hardly surprising to any mom anywhere since it's a role that mothers often play on a daily basis just managing the sibling rivalry that exists in many homes!

Finally, in 1908, another woman, Anna Jarvis, the daughter of Anna Reeves Jarvis, began the movement that is largely credited with our more modern-day recognition of Mother's Day. In honour of the work her mother did, Anna Jarvis advocated for a day to recognize all mothers. The first official celebration of this day was at her local church. It went on to become an official US holiday in 1914. Later in life, however, Anna railed against the commercialization of the holiday she is largely credited with starting.

Now that you know a little of the history, how are you celebrating the women in your life this weekend? Your mom, wife, sister, or partner might not be actively reconciling warring factions from a civil war, but she might just be reconciling the family finances, the fighting children, or the hockey/dance/piano lessons/family holiday or birthday get together schedule. She might, as Anna Jarvis did, rail against the commercialization of the day and claim that she "doesn't want/need anything," but please don't take her at face value. At the very, least mothers do want (and need) some recognition and validation for all they do. It doesn't have to be in the form of a gift from the store, but the gift of your time, and your presence, for many mothers is often the most precious present of all. Unless, of course, you're the mother of a toddler in the throes of the terrible twos, in which case YES ? YES, she does want a break from her kids. Take them out of the house now. For at least a few hours. And for goodness sake bring them back fed, watered, tired and ready for bed.

As I said in my opening paragraph, we are lucky if we have a mom (or similar special person in our lives) to whom we can say "thank you" with real conviction. Moms do a lot of the heavy lifting in families and they are who we turn to when we need a hug, a

healing hand, help getting over heartbreak, help with homework or help with parenting our own kids. Moms dispense wisdom, pass down traditions and treasured family recipes, and moms are who we call when we are in crisis ? or even when we just need to know how long it takes to cook a hard-boiled egg. Yes, Moms were the original ?Google? and like Google, Moms truly do know everything. But unlike Google they dispense their wisdom with love, kindness and hugs. Even better, no matter what kind of egg you put in front of them on Mother's Day, over-cooked, or under-cooked, a mother will exclaim proudly that it's the ?best egg? she's ever had, cooked by the ?best kid's a mom could ever ask for.?

A mother holds you in their hearts forever and will forever be your champion. The least you can do is say ?thanks.?