

Random Thoughts About Mother's Day

By Pat Schwiebert, R.N.

I know some women approach Mother's Day with dread and resentment, finding little reason to celebrate. Mother's Day leaves a bitter taste and reminder of what one doesn't have, never had, or once had but lost. I have come to learn over the years how the impact of not being acknowledged, or hearing trivial and sometimes insensitive words uttered without thinking, can take a toll on a bereft mother as she contemplates Mother's Day

I have to admit Mothers' Day for me is one of my favorite days of the year. Favorite because of the women in my life that have been there for me, teaching me, loving me, challenging me. It's a time when I pause to be grateful for all the opportunities I have been given to see women do things they never thought they could do. I've seen young women who did not know their own strength, giving birth to their babies and experiencing ecstasy as they look into their newborn's eyes just moments after a seemingly endless and painful labor. I have seen women become like mother bears, wanting to protect their young from anything that could potentially harm them. I have seen many a mother who at first was not sure she was ready to bear the pain of parenting, yet cradling her children and loving them to death because she realized there was no one more important than she to be there for her child. I am in absolute awe of what motherhood brings out in a woman: the strength to endure, the profound joy and grief she will go through as a mother, the unconditional love that can be observed nowhere else.

I just learned last night that my sister-in-law has stage 4 cancer and the possibility of a much shorter life than she had expected. Her own children are just beginning to bear children. Her first concern was not for herself but how would she tell her children the difficult news. Such a beautiful statement of motherly love. As we spoke she told me how being with her own mother as she died, and being with her dying sister who was surrounded by her children, makes it easier for her to face her own death. Both of these strong women were full of amazing grace in their last moments. And right to the very end they were teaching their children and all of us present how to do what none of us think we can do—to let go of life. There was no fear. There was no anger or bitterness. Only peace.

I have seen mothers in our support groups hold out hope for those who have no hope that life will get softer. These mothers who are further along in their grief don't sugar coat realities and pretend that life's journey is always easy. We learn how to do the hard stuff by seeing that others have done it before us and trust that if they can, so can we. We are all teachers. We are all students. The children, the sisters are watching. Life is precious and fragile, but the cord that entangles us all is made of steel.

An Afterthought

Her heart quivered with conflicting emotions as she felt their resistance to her persistent nudging. “Why does the thrill of soaring have to begin with the fear of falling?” she thought. The ageless question was still unanswered for her.

As in the tradition of the species, her nest was located high on the shelf of a sheer rock face. Below there was nothing but air to support the wings of each child. “Is it possible that this time it will not work?” she thought. Despite her fears, the eagle knew it was time. Her parental mission was all but complete. There remained one final task – the push.

The eagle drew courage from an innate wisdom. Until her children discovered their wings, there was no purpose for their lives. Until they learned how to soar, they would fail to understand the privilege it was to have been born an eagle. The push was the greatest gift she could offer. It was her supreme act of love. And so one by one, she pushed them out, and they flew.

I used to be angry because I didn't get the mother I thought I deserved. It took me a long time to get over myself and see that in fact I had many women in my life who had mothered me unconditionally and that I had gotten exactly what I needed. I had to get over the fact that, for me, motherhood did not come in the package that I expected. But it did come! Now that my biological mother is gone, I can see her opening to me like a rose and beginning to show me who she was and helping me to accept that indeed she is a very big part of who I am today.

When I stopped seeing my mother with the eyes of a child, I saw the woman who helped me give birth to myself. Nancy Friday

Yes. I love Mothers Day. Not for the cards, or flowers or dinners or presents. But for the examples of love, forgiveness, sorrow, disappointment, humor, determination and grit that I get to remember as I look back on these amazing women—these many mothers in my life.