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E-Haven Email (from griefHaven)

Where Hope Resides

E-HAVEN EMAIL May 2007

Mother's Day. Father's Day. Who Cares?



I Discover . . . I Do

I decided in this month's E-Haven that I would share a personal journey with you surrounding Mother's and Father's Day, because I thought that it might give you some hope and support during these next few weeks. So please join with me as I share with you where my journey began and where it eventually ended.

I want to care—I really do. I want to look forward to Mother's Day and Father's Day like I used to. I try every year to come up with something that will make a significant difference and change it all around so that I, at the very least, am not **just** looking forward to it all being **o-v-e-r**. I'd like to feel warm and fuzzy again. But I have to be perfectly honest with you. Anyone who knows me personally already knows this—I really dislike Mother's Day.

Every year around the first part of May, I start feeling irritated at so many things. And I'm honestly not that way. I have one of those "even-keel" type of

personalities. But not this time of year. Not since May 30, 2002, when Erika, our only child, died. First Mother's Day, then May 30, then her birthday on June 5, and then Father's Day. It's that time of year when we just come up for air, and down we go again. I'm irritable at people who seem petty and simply don't "get it"; at people who are impatient over silly things; at the things society makes so important, when they aren't important at all; at the hypocrisy that plagues this world.

And don't even get me started about those fortunate parents who have healthy children they haven't spoken to in years (I recently met a mother who said she hadn't spoken to her daughter in five years, nor she had she even met her grandchildren, because, in the mother's opinion, her daughter married someone she did not approve of). I know I should not be judgmental about what others are doing. But this time of year, it all cuts just a little too deep, and down inside I experience these things as annoyances because I want to scream and say, "DON'T YOU GET IT? DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW FORTUNATE YOU ARE?" But I don't. I just think and feel it. Then there is the resistance surrounding "celebrating" Mother's Day with my own mother—a beautiful and loving mother who has always been like an angel on this earth. I know logically that no one deserves to be celebrated more than my mother. When my mind kicks in, I can clearly see how irrational and illogical I'm being, but try telling my feelings that.

I worried that I maybe shouldn't tell you all of this because I feared it wouldn't be hopeful enough at such a difficult time for so many. Then I wondered . . . isn't it often the truth that sets us free . . . and isn't it acknowledging what is true that has gotten us this far? After all, hasn't it been all of us sharing the truth about how we feel and what we are going through that has really freed us to hope and to rebuild our lives? Just look at the amazingly, truthful postings on our message board. And hasn't it been our willingness to educate others regarding what it's really like to lose a child that has helped others support us? And hasn't it been the truth, so far, that has told us that everything we are feeling and going through is normal and okay, freeing us up to just "be?"

So I share my feelings and just know I'm not alone in this.

So now that I have gotten that off my chest, it's also in my nature to take the next step.



I can't just leave you with "I really dislike Mother's Day." Something waits to be discovered beneath those feelings. So I asked myself, "I wonder if there is something I haven't thought of yet. Perhaps I've missed something that will help me look at this day in a different light—something which may, in turn, change the entire perspective for me." So I did some research.

Do you know how Mother's and Father's Day got started anyway?

I thought for the longest time that it was a Hallmark-inspired day. But actually, according to the *Silver Anniversary Book* published in 1935, it is centuries old and goes back to the ancient Greeks who held festivities to honor Rhea, the **mother** of the gods. Early Christians celebrated the Mother's festival on the fourth Sunday of Lent to honor Mary, the mother of Christ. Later on, a religious order stretched the holiday to include **all** moth-

ers and named it the *Mothering Sunday*. The English colonists settled in America and discontinued the tradition of *Mothering Sunday* because of lack of time. Now isn't that one heck of a reason to end a special day for mothers?

Then came Julia Ward Howe, a woman best known for writing *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. In 1870, Julia took on a new issue and a new cause. Distressed by her experience of the realities of war, determined that peace was one of the two most important causes in the world (the other being equality in its many forms), she called for women to rise up and come together across national lines, to recognize that what they held in common stood above what divided them, and to commit to finding peaceful resolutions to conflicts. She issued a Declaration, hoping to gather together women in a congress of action, and she deemed that day to be a day for "**mothers dedicated to peace.**" It was the first landmark in the historical development of Mother's Day.

Finally, all of the various causes came together and, in 1907, Anna M. Jarvis began a movement to set up a national Mother's Day in honor of her mother, Ann Maria Reeves Jarvis. She solicited the help of hundreds of legislators and prominent businessmen to create a special day to honor mothers. Anna's hard work paid off in 1914, when President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the second Sunday in May as a national holiday in honor of mothers.

Gradually, what was called "**the Mother's day**" became very popular and gift-giving activity increased. This commercialization of the Mother's day infuriated Anna Jarvis, as she believed that the day's sentiment was being sacrificed for greed and profit.

Father's Day

And what about Father's Day? The idea for creating a day for children to honor their fathers began in Spokane, Washington. A woman by the name of Sonora Smart Dodd thought of the idea for Father's Day while listening to a Mother's Day sermon.



Julia Ward Howe
Circa 1860



Having been raised by her father, William Jackson Smart, after her mother died, Sonora wanted her father to know how special he was to her. It was her father that made all the parental sacrifices and was, in the eyes of his daughter, a courageous, selfless, and loving man. Sonora's father was born in June, so she chose to hold the first Father's Day celebration on June 19, 1910.

In 1926, a National Father's Day Committee was formed in New York City. Father's Day was recognized by a Joint Resolution of Congress in 1956. In 1972, President Richard Nixon established a permanent national observance of Father's Day to be held on the third Sunday of June. So Father's Day was born in the gratitude of a daughter who thought that her father and all good fathers should be honored with a special day just like the one with which we honor mothers.



Then it hit me . . .

I figured out what might work and change my perspective for this and future Mother's and Father's Days.

- I AM a mother, and I will always be Erika's mother.
- Wendell IS a father, and will always be Erika's father.
- The most lovely of all of the Mother's day innovations was that first one, a day for mothers dedicated to peace.

Peace of Heart Day

Erika once said to me, "Why don't they have a day called 'Kids' Day?'" I laughed and told her, "Because every day is kids' day." Now that she's gone, I think she was on to something. I think about how all of our holi-



Child peacefully nestled inside a heart.

days started with someone coming up with an idea and the meaning they chose to attach to it. That idea then took off and was formally declared to be true. Who is to

say that we cannot, then, change—with just the smallest twist of perspective—what this day means to those of us who have lost a child so that the day is also meaningful to us. We can, then, put a little twist on the day that celebrates mothers and fathers by going back to an original context—a day to celebrate PEACE, for there is a kind of peace lacking inside of us during this time, and that is a "Peace of Heart."

We walk the lifelong journey of rebuilding our lives without our children. As wonderful as it is when our other children celebrate these days with us, something still feels empty without that one who helped make up the whole. So I will honor this day as the day where I remember all that Erika gave to me, as those memories bring me a peace of heart. She taught me how to love, and she loved me unconditionally. She needed me, and I needed her. She showed me joy and gave me a life filled with meaning, purpose,



Find something that makes you smile inside. Sandy Godwin called Erika his *Shugarbee*, because her little face looked like a smiley bee. Here's a photo of her bee slippers, and I can't help but smile or laugh when I see these and remember her in them..

and laughter. She taught me to trust love and to embrace the trials and tribulations of the difficult times with commitment, honesty, and compassion. She helped me let go when she needed to fly from the nest and begin living as an adult and wife. And, when the time came, it was our love that gave me the strength to tenderly help her let go of this world and to, once again, let her fly. And it is the depth of that love today that keeps me going, rebuilding my life without her, and sharing my love with all of you.

Thank you for sharing in this journey with me. How glad I am that I kept probing into the possibilities of what I might be able to do with this day that I so disliked. I am glad to have found another way we might all be able to find peace in our hearts by celebrating **them** on the second Sunday of May and the third Sunday of June. Perhaps it will work for you, too. If not that, then find your own, special twist and make it true. Your heart will be glad you did.

Erika's Mom, Susan

On This and Every Mother's and Father's Day, May You Have

Peace of Heart



Until next time, we send our love.

From all of us, we remain dedicated to you and your journey . . .

Anne Roberts

Jill Goodman

Sandy Godwin

Wynne Keenan

D. Roger Taylor

Jenny Fellows

Wendell Whitmore

James Putney

Jennifer Woolf
Lark Woolf

Marc Klaas

Judith H

Paula

John

Steve and Ann

US&T Klaas

Erika's Mom, Susan