

Other Mothers

What's your favorite motherly advice?

- Eat your vegetables
- Wear a sweater
- If everyone jumped off a cliff, would you do it too?
- If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all
- You can do anything you put your mind to

The custom of a special day to honor mothers goes back as far as 17th century England which celebrated Mothering Sunday. In the USA, Mother's day originated in 1872 with Julia Ward Howe, a writer, abolitionist, and suffragist, and it was made a national holiday by President Woodrow Wilson in 1911.

But, the people whom we call "mother," aren't the only ones who nurture us and foster our development. There are "other mothers," truly special people who didn't necessarily look, act or sound like the Ladies Home Journal version of a mother. Some of the life lessons they brought were so sweet that tears flowed; while, others had the same affect as a bee sting or a hot stove.

A woman that I worked with gave me a lasting memory about celebrating those you love. My own mother said that the good china and silver were reserved for guests and special occasions. One day when I was in my late twenties, I walked into the office kitchen where Jean, one of my co-workers, was enthusiastically describing preparations for a special cabbage and sweet sausage meal and ironing her grandmother's table cloth and polishing silver. "Oh," I said. "You must be having a party."

"No," she said, "It's all for my family. They are my most important company. My Russian grandmother taught the recipes and preparations." Because of Jean's example I had a whole new way to think about celebrating family and loved ones. She gave me that beautiful lesson 30 years ago and almost every time I set my table with special linens and dishes, her words come back to me.

Not everyone mothers and nurtures in traditional ways; and the variety is wonderful to experience. The births of ideas and creativity are tremendously important and meaningful, and they often light the way to fulfilling life paths.

The "other mother" who showed me that I was a unique, special person was a man. My high school principal was often thought of as a gruff disciplinarian. Nonetheless, he knew the name of every student in our large student body and probably knew where they lived and what their family life was like. Although he knew everyone's given names, he used nicknames for the majority of the student body and it was his habit and pleasure to use his specialized nicknames. I have no idea where the name that he gave me came from; but, it was Drusilla Aardvark. As far as I know, I don't resemble an aardvark; but, in the mind of this leader of future generations, this font of wisdom, I was unique, and the only Drusilla Aardvark in the entire student body. Three years after graduating, I called my old principal, who had left the principalship for an education agency, and I asked him for advice on getting a job. His voice boomed through the phone, "Why, Drusilla! Come down town and I'll take you to fill out an application." He personally escorted me into the human resource director's office and introduced me by my given name and assured the director that I would be the best employee the agency had ever had. My principal's every word was threaded with motherly pride and I was almost overwhelmed with ambition and certainty that I would make his prediction come true.

I learned the meaning of unconditional love from a woman 25 years my senior who told me how concerned she was about her youngest son. He was increasingly serious about a woman whose life and values were significantly different from those of the family in which he was raised. I empathized with her anxiety as I patted her shoulder and asked her what she was going to do. With an open, trusting gaze, the woman looked at me and said, "I'm going to love her."

"But, but," I stuttered. "Aren't you going to try to change his mind?"

"No, I'm just going to tell him how much I love him and that I plan to love the woman he has chosen to love."

Tears sprung to my eyes and I felt as loved as if she had cradled me in her arms. Through the years there have been a few hit road blocks between me and people I wanted to love. I found myself thinking, "If you will act this way. Or, if you will do this thing, then, I will love you more." And, many times I leaned on the example that my friend gave to me. I have thought of her and the resolve she had to "just love" and not put any qualifications or barriers between her love and the receiver.

Whether you are a traditional mother or not, you are likely to have vast opportunities to nurture old and young. Embrace those times as a gift to you and to them to "just love."

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