

Mother's Day Origins And Traditions

Miss Jarvis has an idea... Mother's Day! It wasn't a singular, new idea, and Miss Jarvis wasn't the first woman to dream it. (Julia Ward Howe tried ever so hard to get Mother's Day into the vernacular as far back as 1870, when she tried to wave it into an international movement for peace, following the Franco-German War.)

Miss Jarvis (Anna Reeves) re-invented the idea at the right time with the emotional appeal that struck a harmonious chord in the hearts of all America.

The time was 1907. Miss Jarvis' mother had recently died. She mourned her loss so deeply, that she confided to a group of friends her desire to make Mother's Day a national observance, out of love and respect for her own mother.

She had a deep conviction that all the mothers in the country would come to appreciate the significance of a day set to honor them, to pay them special homage for all that they had achieved, for all that they had given to the rapidly expanding nation which had only recently spread from coast to coast.

By May, 1908, her idea of a Mother's Day burst upon Grafton, W.V., where the Jarvis family had lived prior to moving to Philadelphia.

It took the encouragement of John Wanamaker, Philadelphia merchant-philanthropist, and the coordinated action of civic groups to bring the idea to fruition.

Like so many other revered holidays, Mother's Day started as a modest church observance, marked by a special sermon delivered in a Grafton church, which still survives as a national shrine to this beloved holiday. More than 95 percent of America marks Mother's Day with special activities ranging from

silent prayer to elaborate gifts, dinners and formal and informal family gatherings.

By 1910, only two years after the birth of the idea, Governor William E. Glassman proclaimed Mother's Day as a state holiday. On the wings of immediate acceptance, Congress, by joint resolution, made Mother's Day a national holiday in 1913.

President Woodrow Wilson had the honor of issuing the first Mother's Day Proclamation, designating that it be observed the second Sunday of every May in all the states, territories and dependencies of the United States.

The rest is hallowed tradition. Mother's Day is no longer solely an American holiday, but a day enjoyed and participated in by many nations all over the world. The 77th Mother's Day will be celebrated on May 12, 1985 - when much of the western world pauses to pay tribute to the unending

responsibilities and gratifications of motherhood.

Miss Jarvis' original concept was founded on the notion of modest expression of reverence - a special letter to mother, a visit to her on Mother's Day, perhaps the token of a flower, so many of which covered the West Virginia countryside in early May.

But the personal letter has been largely supplanted by the greeting card, some lavish beyond Miss Jarvis' imagination. The casual visit has become a feast at a posh restaurant or even a trip for mom to some fantasy vacation resort. The simple wild flower has become a beautiful potted plant or a lavish bouquet of long stemmed roses. But the symbolism of the simple carnation, Miss Jarvis' mother's favorite flower, has not been lost in the explosion resulting from

her idea.


Miss Jarvis dedicated her life to the promulgation of the Mother's Day movement. She lobbied in Congress, she solicited support in state houses, she wrote copiously, collected clippings, and became obsessed with her concept as it grew little by little, over the decades. Finally, Mother's Day had taken a life of its own.

When Miss Jarvis died in 1948 she was lonely, perhaps disturbed, yet she had been rewarded by the international embrace of her vision of a special Mother's Day, based on emotional gratitude.

Our expression of Mother's Day has been spontaneous. America, and the world, took to Mother's Day and made it the beloved holiday we celebrate the second Sunday of every May.

This year, Mother's Day is May 12th.

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