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Traversing the Mother's Day Minefield

By Jennifer Wake



Homemade gifts can tug at heart strings when kids are little Photo Jennifer Wake

Flowers. Brunch. A manicure. These are all great ways to say "thanks, Mom" on Mother's Day. Although it's anticipated that less will be spent on Mother's Day this year due to the poor economy, the National Retail Federation is forecasting that consumers will still spend \$14.1 billion on the holiday in 2009.

Touted as one of the busiest days for restaurants and florists, with approximately \$1.98 billion spent on flowers and \$2.83 billion at restaurants, Mother's Day, for some, can also be a day of disappointment.

A recent report by Mount Holyoke College graduate student Nicole Gilbert noted that although mothers receive more attention on Mother's Day than father's do on Father's Day, the majority of mothers in the study felt disappointed on their special day, especially those with high expectations of lavish gifts or relaxing getaways, brought on by advertisements and media attention.

Even in the most traditional of settings, Mother's Day can be difficult. Throw in a life change, such as a divorce, and you have a challenge.

Lafayette resident Marilyn Finn was divorced from her husband when her three children were 10, 13, and 16. She said that after her divorce, Mother's Day became a non-holiday. "My friend, Gerda, and I used to share Mother's Day stories," Finn said. "Gerda would say, 'It's just one of those days we just get past.' Then she would say, 'What should we look forward to doing after it's over this year?'"

Finn says when kids are young they don't pay much attention to Mother's Day (or Father's Day), unless someone is there to push them. "The missing spouse helped the children to celebrate the day, so when the spouse is gone, nothing

tends to happen."

Experts suggest planning ahead for Mother's Day, and getting grandparents or good friends involved to help make sure Mother's Day happens.

Gifts don't have to be lavish. For most moms, the thought truly counts.

Single mother Nicolette McClain arranges flowers for a living, so she says the last thing she wants is flowers for Mother's Day. Her three children, ages 11, 15, and 21 have made her a Mother's Day breakfast for the past three years.

"I absolutely love it," McClain said. "They made blueberry pancakes one year, and last year they made waffles, which were awful," she added with a chuckle. "They were hard and crunchy, but I didn't care. They do the shopping (so it's a surprise) and clean the house, so it's spotless."

Before McClain's own mother had to go into a convalescent home, McClain had her join in the breakfast tradition. "It was a nice way for us all to celebrate together," she said.

Sharing activities on Mother's Day can help reduce stress. Moms and daughters can go together for a pampering retreat at a local spa, or enjoy a joint pedicure.

Does your mom love musicals or sports? Get tickets to the theater or catch a ball game at AT&T Park.

On a tighter budget? Catch a matinee movie, or bring a ball and bat to the park for a barbecue baseball party. With new technologies available, digital photos and talking frames are also an easy way to personalize a gift.

Experts advise families to think of activities that are age appropriate for the children. As much as mom might love fine dining, taking her and young children to a nice restaurant could be disastrous, while teens might be the most receptive to participating in this activity.

Orinda mom Rosi Kimball, who has 2.5 year old twins Annaliese and Jack, spends quiet time in the morning with her kids and her husband, and cooks breakfast before heading to Lafayette Reservoir or Briones for a hike, go fly a kite at Crissy Field, or hang out at their pool. "All in all we spend time outdoors," she said. "In the evening we all go out to dinner. La Cucina or Casa Orinda are very 'kid' friendly."

For some moms, a personal note of thanks will do just fine.

Lafayette resident Katherine Tanner, and her husband Jason, normally write how much their mothers mean to them in a card and get together for a meal.

"For Mother's Day we keep it pretty simple," she said. "My daughter, Audrey, is only two, so Jason writes a card from her perspective telling me why I'm so special. Since we don't make Mother's Day a big lavish event, I don't feel like my Mother's Day is conflicting with my mom's Mother's Day."

And Mother's Day is not only for mothers anymore. According to the Emily Post Institute, Mother's Day is not only a time to honor mom, but for other people in our lives who fill that caring role, or for people who might be disconnected from or who have lost loved ones.

After a close friend passed away, Tanner made sure to call her friend's mother the following Mother's Day to let her know she was thinking of her. They continue to have a close bond.

For Tanner, Mother's Day is a time that shouldn't just happen once a year. "You should always take time to let your mom know how much you love her," she said. "When you're a mom, Mother's Day is an everyday thing."

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