



Ananta Jiva News

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Celebrating Mom

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Did you know?

The history of Mother's Day is centuries old and the earliest Mother's Day celebrations can be traced back to the spring celebrations of ancient Greece in honor of Rhea, the Mother of the Gods. During the 1600's, the early Christians in England celebrated a day to honor Mary, the mother of Christ. By a religious order the holiday was later expanded in its scope to include all mothers, and named as the Mothering Sunday. Celebrated on the 4th Sunday of Lent (the 40 day period leading up to Easter), "Mothering Sunday" honored the mothers of England.

During this time many of the England's poor worked as servants for the wealthy. As most jobs were located far from their homes, the servants would live at the houses of their employers. On Mothering Sunday, the servants would have the day off and were encouraged to return home and spend the day with their mothers. A special cake, called the mothering cake, was often brought along to provide a festive touch.

As Christianity spread throughout Europe the celebration changed to honor the "Mother Church" - the spiritual power that gave them life and protected them from harm. Over time the church festival blended with the Mothering Sunday celebration . People began honoring their mothers as well as the church.

With the passage of time, the practice of this fantastic tradition ceased slowly. The English colonists settled in America discontinued the tradition of Mothering Sunday because of lack of time.

In the United States, Mother's Day was loosely inspired by the British day and was first suggested after the American Civil War by social activist Julia Ward Howe. Howe (who wrote the words to the Battle hymn of the Republic) was horrified by the carnage of the Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War and so, in 1870, she tried to issue a manifesto for peace at international peace conferences in London and Paris (it was much like the later Mother's Day Peace Proclamation). During the Franco-Prussian war in the 1870s, Julia began a one-woman peace crusade and made an impassioned "appeal to womanhood" to rise against war. She composed in Boston a powerful plea that same year (generally considered to be the original Mothers' Day proclamation*) translated it into several languages and distributed it widely. In 1872, she went to London to promote an international Woman's Peace Congress. She began promoting the idea of a "Mother's Day for Peace" to be celebrated on June 2, honoring peace, motherhood and womanhood. In the Boston Mass, she initiated a Mothers' Peace Day observance on the second Sunday in June, a practice that was to be established as an annual event and practiced for at least 10 years. The day was, however, mainly intended as a call to unite women against war. It was due to her efforts that in 1873, women in 18 cities in America held a Mother's Day for Peace gathering. Howe rigorously championed the cause of official celebration of Mothers Day and declaration of official holiday on the day. She held meetings every year at Boston on Mother's Peace Day and took care that the day was well-observed. The celebrations died out when she turned her efforts to working for peace and women's rights in other ways. Howe failed in her attempt to get the formal recognition of a Mother's Day for Peace. Her remarkable contribution in the establishment of Mother's Day, however, remains in the fact that she organized a Mother's Day dedicated to peace. It is a landmark in the history of Mother's Day in the sense that this was to be the precursor to the modern Mother's Day celebrations. To acknowledge Howe's achievements a stamp was issued in her honor in 1988.

It should be well to remember that Howe's idea was influenced by Ann Marie Reeves Jarvis, a young Appalachian homemaker who, starting in 1858, had attempted to improve sanitation through what she called "Mothers Friendship Day". In the 1900's, at a time when most women devoted their time solely on their family and homes, Jarvis was working to assist in the healing of the nation after the Civil War. She organized women throughout the Civil War to work for better sanitary conditions for both sides and in 1868 she began work to reconcile Union and Confederate neighbors. Ann was instrumental in saving thousands of lives by teaching women in her Mothers Friendship Clubs the basics of nursing and sanitation which she had learned from her famous physician brother James Reeves, M.D. In parts of the United States it was customary to plant tomatoes outdoors after Mother's Work Days (and not before).

It was Jarvis' daughter, Anna Jarvis, who finally succeeded in introducing Mother's Day in the sense as we celebrate it today. Anna graduated from the Female Seminary in Wheeling and taught in Grafton for a while. Later she moved to Philadelphia with her family. Anna had spent many years looking after her ailing mother. This is why she preferred to remain a spinster. When her mother died in Philadelphia on May 9, 1905, Anna missed her greatly. So did her sister Elsinore whom she looked after as well. Anna felt children often neglected to appreciate their mother enough while the mother was still alive. Now, she intended to start a Mother's Day, as an honoring of the mothers. In 1907, two years after her mother's death, Anna Jarvis disclosed her intention to her friends who supported her cause wholeheartedly. So supported by her friends, Anna decided to dedicate her life to her mother's cause and to establish Mother's Day to "honor mothers, living and dead." She started the campaign to establish a national Mother's Day. With her friends, she started a letter-writing campaign to urge ministers, businessmen and congressmen in declaring a national Mother's Day holiday. She hoped Mother's Day would increase respect for parents and strengthen family bonds.

As a result of her efforts the first mother's day was observed on May 10, 1908, by a church service honoring Late Mrs. Reese Jarvis, in the Andrews Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia, where she spent 20 years taking Sunday school classes. Grafton is the home to the International Mother's Day Shrine. Another service was also conducted on the same date in Philadelphia where Mrs. Jarvis died, leaving her two daughters Anna and Elsinore. So it was more of a homage service for Mrs. Reeves Jarvis than a general one conducted in honor of motherhood. Nevertheless, this set the stage for the later Mother's Day observances held in the honor of motherhood.

Following this, it gained a widespread popularity across the nation. The Mother's Day International Association came into being on

December 12, 1912, to promote and encourage meaningful observances of the event. Anna's dream came true when on May 9, 1914, the Presidential proclamation declared the 2nd Sunday of May to be observed as Mother's Day to honor the mothers.

It was here in the first observance that the carnations were introduced by Miss Jarvis. Large jars of white carnations were set about the platform where the service was conducted. At the end of the exercise one of these white carnations was given to each person present as a souvenir of Mother's Day. All this was done because the late elder Jarvis was fond of carnations.

From there, the custom caught on -- spreading eventually to 45 states. The first Mother's Day proclamation was issued by the governor of West Virginia in 1910. Oklahoma celebrated it in that same year. It stirred the same way in as far west as the state of Washington. And by 1911 there was not a state in the Union that did not have its own observances for Mother's Day. Soon it crossed the national boundary, as people in Mexico, Canada, South America, China, Japan and Africa all joined the spree to celebrate a day for mother love.

The Mother's Day International Association came into being on December 12, 1912, to promote and encourage meaningful observances of the event. Starting from 1912, Mother's day began to be officially declared a holiday by some states. Anna's dream came true when in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson declared the first national Mother's Day, as a day for American citizens to show the flag in honor of those mothers whose sons had died in war.

The House of Representatives in May 1913 unanimously adopted a resolution requesting the President, his cabinet, the members of both Houses and all officials of the federal government to wear a white carnation on Mother's Day. On May 7, 1914, a resolution providing that the second Sunday in May be designated Mother's Day was introduced by Representative James T. Heflin of Alabama and Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas. It passed both Houses and on May 9, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson made the first official announcement proclaiming Mother's Day as a national holiday that was to be held each year on the 2nd Sunday of May.

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