

A Reason to Celebrate

By Lisa Calice

Mother's Day...it once seemed so simple. Even as a very young child, I had what seemed like a "built-in" awareness that Mother's Day and Father's Day were very special holidays. I have fond recollections of making a "Pet Rock" for my dad for this auspicious occasion, and creating a "macramé" plant hanger for my mom. I remember "helping" my dad or my two siblings make breakfast-in-bed for my mom on Mother's Day...and my mom enjoying it anyway. I know the countless macaroni art projects, paintings, homemade greeting cards, and coupon booklets promising special chores, all held special significance. After all, moms and dads are very special people and they deserve to be honored! How simple it all seemed for me as child, to understand what Mother's Day and Father's Day meant. Celebrating these occasions seemed almost as natural to me as breathing.

Many years later, when I married, I looked forward to becoming a mother for what seemed like all the perfect and joyous reasons. Mother's Day was still a day to honor my mother, but also a day that filled me with hope of what was to come. I knew that soon it would be MY turn to be a parent, and to share my life with a child or children of my own. Before long, Mother's Day became like a milestone, marking each childless year as it passed. In retrospect, the grief and loss I felt throughout that time had a profound way of making me more appreciative of what I had. In the end, I gained a valuable perspective that I am certain will never leave me -- motherhood and fatherhood are precious gifts. What an awesome honor and privilege it is, to be responsible for and to love a child – whether or not you are the one who brought him or her into this world! The most humbling adoptive parent experience of all is that I have been entrusted with the future of another mother's child. In my case, I am entrusted with THREE such beautiful lives! This is the most important job I will ever have. And even though I did not attain motherhood in the traditional manner, my role as a mother makes me special. These are all compelling reasons for me to celebrate Mother's Day.
Oh, if only it could be as easy as it sounds!

My first Mother's Day held a dream-like quality for me. When I reflect on it now, it seems like an occurrence from another place and another lifetime. As a newly adoptive mom, how could I have imagined what this day really meant for me, and more importantly, what it meant for my children? My first mistake was in thinking that Mother's Day was MY day. I could not have been more wrong! It was a lovely spring day, and I had been a mom for six whole months. Even though my children were five, six and seven at the time - having just emigrated here from Ukraine half a year earlier - they had no idea what Mother's Day was until that first momentous occasion.

Sitting in church that first Mother's Day morning, my kids fidgeted profusely as I dreamed of the beautiful red carnation – a once illusive symbol of motherhood - that would soon be mine at the end of the liturgy. Let me say, it was not in any way what I expected. I strolled proudly up the center aisle in my brand new Mother's Day attire to claim my prize. My kids, who always clung to me and would not risk letting me out of their sight for a moment – were dragged along with me. As if that was not enough – once we got to the front of the church, they received blessed flowers from our priests too! It was not MY day after all; I was overlooking something very important.

Following church, my husband took us to a Mother's Day Brunch. My kids misbehaved. They picked at their food, they whined and squirmed and were in general quite disagreeable. They could have cared less about this brunch, let alone this day! Of course, I tried to make the best of a difficult situation, but in the end no one really enjoyed the day – least of all me. Mother's Day was nothing like what I had imagined at all. When I think of it now, it seems very unrealistic, and perhaps a bit selfish of me to have had such high expectations. My children and I had openly discussed their birthparents, even when communication had been quite a challenge. Back then, "birth mom" was "druhy mama" – meaning "other mama", and I understood enough Ukrainian to know that my children loved and missed their birth moms. Yet on

Mother's Day, I neglected to acknowledge the moms who were so conspicuously absent. I was well intentioned; my heart filled with an abundance of love for my new children and the joy of having become their mother. It appeared to be a cause for celebration, and it was. My real mistake was looking at this special day, at the expense of everything else, as something I had coming to me-- a birthright. My perspective on Mother's Day has certainly changed from what it was that first idealistic year...and it is still evolving.

As difficult as it has been for me to deal with my disappointments, I cannot begin to imagine what it was like, and may still be like for my children to celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day. My children were grieving the losses of all things familiar: their birth-country, their caregivers and friends. I know a day did not go by – and I know this is still true – when my children didn't think of and wonder about their birthparents. Considering this, it is not surprising that my children felt far less than enthusiastic about celebrating a holiday of ANY kind, let alone a day called "Mother's Day". After all, what am I to my children? I sometimes feel that after only two years together, we are little more than strangers in many ways. I can only imagine that honoring me with a special day that at the same time excludes the woman who gave them life, must be excruciating to my children. Some days my children are not even sure if they really like me all that much yet!

To me, this is a perfect example of how there can be cause for disappointment in a family newly formed by adoption,. Every one of us viewed our first Mothers Day from a different perspective based on our own experiences, and unfortunately, our expectations did not mesh. My kids have had no control over anything that has happened to them in their short lives... they came to the past two Mother's Days and now face yet another with me, without ever having said good-bye to their first mothers. How brave these little souls have to be to face their pain and grief in the midst of all these expectations!

This year will mark my third Mother's Day. It looms ahead of me somewhat ominously, like a spring storm, and there is no telling how much rain we'll get. That is to say nothing of what it will be like for my kids. Now that my children are in school, Mother's Day is not just one simple day... it is more like an entire season. At school, there is going to be an event for all the First and Second Grade mothers. My kids are very excited to be doing something special for me, yet they are under so much pressure to perform. And the world around them has no wonderful party planned to remember their first mother, the mother who gave them life, the mother they miss and sometimes hate. They live in a rather sad and scary world at times; their little heads and hearts are filled with mixed up thoughts and feelings, and Mother's Day and Father's Day certainly do not make it any easier.

This Mother's Day, I am looking forward to wearing my favorite pin. It is a beautiful, gold-colored, Winnie-the-Pooh pin, given to me by a dear friend, which simply says, "Mom". When I pin it to my dress, I will smile, because this is who I am now, and I have three kids to call me by my new and wonderful name. I am looking forward to celebrating what is most amazing about my motherhood: of my growing in love and wisdom, and of building a relationship with my three new children in spite of all the obstacles we face. I cannot say that our brief time together has been completely blissful, but it is in many ways wonderful - even miraculous. I plan to enjoy each moment of this Mother's Day, whatever it might bring, and however stormy it might be. There will be something to appreciate about my children and about my being their mother. Most importantly, I am going to be there for my children to make the day a little easier. I will not forget to acknowledge the women who are special to my family: the women who brought my children into this world, and who through no choice of their own, shared these precious angels with me. Knowing that our all of our losses ultimately brought us together and made us a family, can be a reason to celebrate.

I may not know how this will all turn out, but I am certain my Mother's Day will begin very early in the morning - with my Golden Retrievers pouncing on me until they are certain I am awake. There will be many wet, doggie-breath kisses, and if I am lucky, breakfast or at least coffee in bed. From my children, there are sure to be smiles, hugs and kisses, beautiful hand-made greeting cards, school projects, and many other surprises. Sitting here tonight, I can't complain. Amid the many challenges, and all of the stormy days... there is bound to be some sunshine on Mother's Day.