

Subject: Inspirational Stories – Holidays

The Real Politics Of Mother's Day

"From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own: it says 'Disarm. Disarm.'" That's an excerpt from the document that launched Mother's Day in America. Its origins were not with breakfast in bed or a corsage or a greeting card; it began as a political cry for peace.

Known as "The Mother's Day Proclamation for Peace," it was written in 1870 by Julia Ward Howe, the mother of six. Howe had recently walked the battlefields of the Civil War with her husband and with Abraham Lincoln. She had just written "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." But now, as the Franco Prussian War was beginning, she felt that she could not bear any more violence. She called for a congress of women to gather immediately to promote "Peace: A Mother's Day for Peace."

Julia Ward Howe held a standing room only meeting in Boston the day that she read that proclamation. About that same time, there was Anna Jarvis, who organized "A Mother's Friendship Day" in which mothers from both North and South whose sons had died in the Civil War came, dressed in gray or blue, held hands together and sang.

Anna Jarvis's daughter -- who shared her name -- organized what is now considered to be the first U.S. Mother's Day on May 10, 1908. It was a church service dedicated to mothers, recognizing the unappreciated work that mothers do, and calling for peace in the home and in the world. Andrews Methodist Church, in Grafton, W. Va., is considered the Mother Church of Mother's Day. The next year Mother's Day was celebrated in 45 states.

President Woodrow Wilson got into the act on May 9, 1914, officially naming the second Sunday in May "Mother's Day," and redefining its purpose in a non-political way. His declaration included flowery language about the important role mothers play in the home and in society. But Wilson said nothing about a mother's role in promoting peace in the world.

Long before all of this, Mother's Day had origins in ancient Greece, with Rhea, mother of the Gods. We have only sketchy details of springtime rituals celebrating her, but we know there was festive food and dancing.

In the 1600s, England celebrated a day called "Mothering Sunday." Servants lived far from their own homes, but on Mothering Sunday they headed home, usually with a "mothering cake" to share with their own mothers.

Here in the United States, as the day became commercialized, founder Anna Jarvis spent much of her time trying to discourage people from buying greeting cards and flowers for mom. At the end of her life she said she was sorry she had ever gotten "Mother's Day" started, so desperate was she for a return to the peace message of her holiday.

As the mother of three kids, ages 8, 9 and 12, I appreciate getting a bouquet of flowers in May. But there's so much more at stake. This year, I've been telling my kids about the roots of the holiday. The tears burn in my eyes as I speak the words of Julia Ward Howe, written in 1870, but alarmingly relevant today. Here's the complete text of her "Mother's Day Proclamation for Peace":

"Arise, then, women of this day!

Arise all women who have hearts! Whether your baptism be that of water or of tears!

Say firmly:

We will not have questions decided by irrelevant agencies, Our husbands shall not come to us reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.

Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.

We women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.

From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own.

It says, 'Disarm, Disarm!'

The sword of murder is not the balance of justice! Blood does not wipe out dishonor nor violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel.

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them then solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after their own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.

In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the

alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions, the great and general interests of peace."