

For Fathers

Their Mother's Day

by Andrew Stenhouse

Soon after the divorce I was walking through Target picking up the basic household items when a wave of optimism came over me. As I picked up a pair of clear plastic salt and pepper shakers, I felt like a college kid moving into his first apartment. I was independent, hopeful and embracing the promise of a kind future.

Then came the crash. As my young daughters noticed the Mother's Day display, they innocently asked, "What are we going to get Mom for Mother's Day?"

I was shocked. *They had to be kidding! Why would I do anything for her?* My thoughts were hardly charitable, but, fortunately, what finally came out was something much less venomous.

"I don't know girls. What do you think *you* should get her?"

I pretended to be interested in their suggestions as we continued to walk through the store. I tried to somehow put this dilemma into perspective. They loved her. I loved them.

Mother's Day had to be redefined that year.

Never very good at distinguishing holidays, I had always viewed Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and my wife's birthday as pretty much the same holiday spread out over the year. Now I realized that Mother's Day was not "Wife's Day," "Ex-wife's Day," or even "Co-Parent Day." It actually had nothing to do with me (except for my own mother of course) but everything to do with my daughters and their mother.

Since that Mother's Day, my daughters and I have begun settling into a pattern that works and, most important, honors their mother. This year we will formalize the ritual.

- The girls pick out flowers for their mother, which symbolize something they appreciate about her.
- They each pick out a greeting card that expresses the most appropriate feelings they have for their mother. They underline the parts that are most meaningful and then write, "I am so glad that you are my mom because. . ."
- They take time to make something. Of course, these are the gifts that always mean the most because of the time and thought put into these treasures.
- I give them a small budget to spend on a gift that comes from them both. They go shopping and pick out the gift together.

Mother's Day is a day for my daughters to express their love to their mother. Each year I think of the love I have for my own mother and am so grateful that my daughters can feel the same way.

Recently, during a movie night at home, I realized that the one thing Peter Pan and his Lost Boys had in common with Captain Hook and his Band of Pirates was that none of them had mothers, at least none they could remember. The moving part of the story was when Wendy became the surrogate mother to the Lost Boys. She brought peace, comfort and joy.

Years later, in the 1991 sequel starring Robin Williams, Peter's little girl, faced with the horror of Captain Hook, revealed her explanation for his evil behavior.

“Someone needs a mommy very, very badly!”

We all do.

How fortunate I am that my daughters have a mommy who loves them so much. So much in fact, that she is the only one on this planet who loves them as much as I do.

Andy Stenhouse helps his daughters celebrate Mother's Day in Costa Mesa, Calif.