

**PERSPECTIVE: To Celebrate Mother's Day Without Her**  
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From the tiniest kindergarten student to the chief executive officer of a major corporation, Mother's Day is the time to acknowledge the woman whose unlimited and unselfish acts made life's trials more bearable and life's triumphs much sweeter. It is a pleasant holiday; that is, until your mother dies, and you become a mere observer in the annual celebration of motherhood.

For several friends and I who have lost our mothers, Mother's Day is a bittersweet time when we must survive an onslaught of emotions that can leave us feeling alone and overwhelmed. Although we are always aware of our mothers' absences, on the second Sunday in May we are painfully reminded all day long that we are no longer "Mama's baby," but motherless daughters. There are no decision to make about which gift to buy or which card would be just right. There is no one to call on the telephone and no one to visit and simply say, "Thanks for all you've done."

With hope and courage in our hearts, we endeavor to remain composed as the world screams at us to remember a woman whom we can never forget. We hold our heads high and our shoulders back and try to be the strong and mature women our mothers envisioned we would be.

For the past few years, my friend Cathy and I have called each other on Mother's Day morning. I don't know how this ritual started, but it's one that we have maintained since our mothers passed. Our Mother's Day Call has become a way to check in with each other and how we are feeling. It is comforting and reassuring to know that someone else understands what it means to be without your mother on that special day. I can cry via fiber optics, if I need to. The Mother's Day Call is a gift that Cathy and I exchange.

After our call, Cathy and I begin our journey through the day. In a sense, we are small children again, learning to walk, except this time we must master new skills without our mothers to catch us.

I was fortunate enough to reach adulthood before my mother died. I can only imagine how painful it must be for daughters denied the opportunity to know their mothers. I became acutely aware of this when I married a widower with three daughters, the youngest of whom was less than 2 years old when his wife died. She has no memory of her mother's voice or the warmth of being cuddled by the person her sisters knew as Mom.

I imagine not knowing the woman who nurtured you early in life leaves you with a knot in your heart. Other people have to answer simple questions about your mother's favorite foods, or whether the two of you shared things beyond physical characteristics like hair and eye color.

Several women who have been motherless daughters for a while tell me that living through and beyond Mother's Day gets easier as time goes by. The pain never disappears, they say — living with the void just becomes easier. You move forward, take risks and console yourself when you stumble. I am confident that many future Mother's Day mornings will find Cathy and me waking up without feeling battered in body and spirit.

This year my first Mother's Day Call was to my friend Pam, whose mother died just last December (your first Mother's Day without your mother is the toughest). I left her a message on her machine, but the real message was unstated: I care, and you're not alone. Someone else knows how it feels to be without Mom on Mother's Day. She called to thank me the next day.

May 11, 1997, marked my seventh Mothers' Day without my mother. Each day, and

especially on Mother's Day, the silent prayer for the deceased reminds me that the parent-child bond is never severed. I continue to chant for my mother's happiness, secure in the knowledge that my daimoku is elevating her life-condition. Through my practice I have turned my grief into appreciation. I realize that I was fortunate to have known my mother until I was 30. Since her passing, I courageously try to live in a way that would make her proud to call me her daughter.

As Monday morning dawned, Cathy, Pam and I awoke and walked out into the world with a purposeful stride toward our destinies, a little prouder and a little stronger. We know our mothers, Helen Boston, Sylvia Perkins and Effie Robinson, would not have it any other way.

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