

Mother's Day: The first mother's day was not at all as it is today. It began as an antiwar day, a Mother's Day for Peace, and it began with one woman. The wars were the U.S. Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War. The woman was Julia Ward Howe.

During the Civil War, Howe penned the famous *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, an incredible theological call to arms. In it she uses arousing Christian images to sanctify dying and killing for a cause, in this case to end slavery. Her words use Christian doctrine to sing out, "As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free." Similar holy but non-Christian doctrine would one day be considered a jihad call to terror in future and far distant wars.

But in 1870 after Howe read of the Franco-Prussian War which devastated much of Europe, Howe had an epiphany, an insight into the reality of dying and killing for just causes, especially as it pertained to sons of mothers, killing sons of other mothers, all sons dying in the practice of war. It awakened a consciousness in her. She questioned herself not only as to why it is that nations do this to one another, but also what might women do to spoil the spoils of war.

Howe asked: "Why do not the mothers of mankind interfere in these matters to prevent the waste of that human life of which they alone bear and know the cost?" Her appeal was on a global scale to all women of the world, particularly those who had sent a son to war. After having written the *Hymn* 12 years earlier, she now wrote her Mother's Day Proclamation to women worldwide of their sacred right as mothers to protect the human life and implored women, all the world over, to awake to the knowledge of the sacred right vested in them as mothers to protect the human life.

She wrote: "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 a devastated Earth a voice goes up with our own. It says: 'Disarm, Disarm!' In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality, may be appointed and held at someplace deemed most convenient, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions, the great and general interests of peace."

Howe traveled to London in 1872 to initiate a Women's Peace Congress and began observing Mothers Day devoted to the advocacy of peace doctrines. She funded celebrations for 12 years. Without her financial support, there was no support for a Mother's Day for Peace and celebrations ceased.

A women's group in West Virginia led by Anna Reeves Jarvis was organized to celebrate an adaptation of Howe's holiday. It was a Mother's Friendship Day designed to reunite families and neighbors divided between the Union and Confederate sides of the Civil War. After Anna Reeves Jarvis died in 1905, her daughter Anna M. Jarvis politically campaigned for the creation of an official Mother's Day in remembrance of her mother and in honor of peace.

On May 10, 1908, her first Mother's Day celebration took place at Andrew's Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginian where her mother had spent over 20 years teaching Sunday School. By the next year, forty-six states as well as parts of Canada and Mexico were holding Mother's Day services.

Anna M. Jarvis devoted herself to the creation of a Mother's Day. She petitioned state governments, business leaders, women groups and others. In 1914 President Woodrow Wilson signed Mother's Day into national observance on the second Sunday in May. But it became a holiday exploited *extraordinaire*. Its commercialization greatly disturbed Jarvis and she vociferously opposed what she perceived as a misuse of the holiday.

In 1923 she sued to stop a Mother's Day event and in the 1930's she was arrested for "disturbing the peace" (no less) at the American War Mothers group, protesting their sale of flowers. She also petitioned against a postage stamp featuring her mother, a vase of white carnations, and the words "Mother's Day." The words "Mother's Day" were removed, but not the flowers. When Jarvis fought to copyright Mother's Day in 1938, it was too late to stop the commercialization.

Despite her opposition to her perceived flower industry's exploitation of the holiday, flower sales on Mother's Day continued to grow. Florist's Review wrote, "Miss Jarvis was completely squelched." Still, some mothers who lost a child to war continue to observe the day as a protest against war. Modern day Mother's Day is a \$15 Billion industry.

Anna Jarvis died blind, poor, and childless. At the time of her death in 1948, over 40 countries throughout the world observed Mother's Day. The Florist's Exchange, anonymously and unaware to Anna,

had paid for her extended care. Perhaps they did it in appreciation of their good fortune, thanks to her, or perhaps they even did it in thanks and appreciation for her, for her work, for her mother, for her Mother's Day.

Sources: <http://www.mothersdaycentral.com/about-mothersday/history/>

Valarie Ziegler, Democracy NOW! "War and Peace Report," May 06, 2005

April Vitello, AP Writer, "Mother's Day celebration reaches 100th anniversary," USAToday5/10/08