

Rose tinted glasses – reflections on motherhood not often viewed

by Janelle Fletcher

Flowers on the bedside table. Breakfast in bed with lukewarm tea that has over-spilled onto the saucer brought lovingly in by your young child. A chance not to have to cook that day. Takeaways perhaps! Hand painted card with stick figured characters with love hearts in-between. Lunch or dinner with the family. Scorched almonds to totally devour yourself. Phone calls – from near and far acknowledging that you are a MOM – mother of magnificence! – for the day at least! Glossy magazines portraying super-mums to whom we should, or could, possibly aspire to – typically rich, career women with flawless features, huge smiles and boundless energy.

A very select, but sometimes biased view or perspective on what Mother's Day can be like for some. So how does Mother's Day really look and feel like for many women out there in the real world?

What about people, who have lost their mothers through death or sickness or who have been estranged from them by distance, location or life events? Who of them feel lonely, unsupported, sad or possibly depressed?

For those men or women who are terminally ill, or for those who have terminally ill children, what does that feel like to have this perhaps being the last Mother's Day they will ever experience together? Possibly a sense of helplessness or hopelessness? Possibly a sense that "time is running out" and an associated urgency to "get things done, get things said". Probably intense sadness.

For those of us who have experienced losing a child – whether through miscarriage, stillbirth, accident, illness or death, there is still possibly an open wound that never feels like it will heal and a huge gap that feels like it will never be filled.

For those women or couples, who have chosen at some stage to have an abortion – what does that bring up for them on Mother's Day? Possibly heartache for those who have gone on unable to have further children. Possibly regret. Possibly a reminder of their situation or the indecision that they experienced at the time. Possibly gratitude considering their past and present circumstances.

How does Mother's Day feel for those women, who years ago gave their babies up for adoption and for whom closed adoption was the only option? How do the generation of women feel, whose pregnancy and subsequent adoption was done in secrecy or against their will? With more recent open adoption practices, what does the mother feel about the child she gave up and how do adopted children acknowledge the mother(s) in their lives?

Step-families or re-partnered families are not at all a rarity these days. How does a child acknowledge mum and / or step-mum without treading on someone's toes and crossing the often inbuilt "loyalty" line? Feelings of confusion, disloyalty, betrayal and envy, for example, may be prevalent especially if the process of "blending the families" has not been managed well by either, or all, parties. In the scenario of blended or re-partnered families, some people may even have more than one "mother-in-law" to acknowledge in some way.

With the increasing average age of women having children and the number of women delaying having their children, what is it like for those going through fertility hassles – dearly wanting to become a parent, but to date not being able to? More often than not, a sense of loss associated with what they thought parenting would bring to them and how they thought parenting would shape their sense of "who they are."

What about the generation of women – especially nowadays – who would dearly love grandchildren, but whose daughters prefer the career route and childless life? They too may sense of loss of the role and associated activities and connections that they imagined for themselves one day.

What about people, who gladly joined the ranks of motherhood but who are plagued with feelings of isolation, loneliness, guilt, low self-esteem, lack of "success", boredom or the need for a social outlet, for example, and get locked into society's expectations that they juggle everything and still look great and in control the whole time? We hear of the wonderful "pluses" of motherhood but there are also "losses" that can come with that particular choice or transition?

At the other end of the spectrum, “empty nest” may have hit. How confusing it can be to have feelings of wanting to have contact with your kids and know what they are up to, yet also wanting them out of the house for the sake of their own independence and equally for you to feel like you’ve “got your life back!” Tricky mixture of feelings!

Doom and gloom? Some of these scenarios can feel like it for some. Can be painful, can bring up feelings such as guilt, shame, sadness, anger, frustration, heartache and regret. There are, however, some steps and actions that can help heal some of those wounds (often generational ones) and be a comfort to those who find days such as Mother’s day difficult – remembering too that a woman’s experience is not one in isolation. Partners, husbands, boyfriends, parents and kids - all may to some degree be affected because they too may be experiencing loss and grief in their own way or they may be trying to cope with your reaction to loss and change.

So how can we help ourselves and others, not only cope with Mother’s Day, but to be with the emotions and wounds that may still be quite raw?

- LOVE – Listen, Observe, Validate and Enjoy people and yourself. Practise acts of kindness, speak nicely to one another, treat everyone as special every day. Notice the great things they do and the great people they are. Do this to yourself as well.
- Remember everyone is different in their responses to what happens in their lives. Be genuine in your interaction with people. Do what instinctively feels right for each person or situation that presents itself.
- Don’t just judge people or assume you know what’s going on for them. Look behind the smile and nice words. People may be really hurting. As an organisation, retail outlet, church or individual, be sensitive to people and what might be going on in their lives.
- Connect with people who support you being real and honest and who care deeply about you. Consider coaching or healing to support you.
- Mother’s Day is not necessarily just about being a mother or having a mother. Surely it is more about the relationships and connections we have with others. Show gratitude to the women figure(s) you had, or have, in your life. This may be in the form of a letter, a phone call, a card, a visit to the graveside with flowers and kind words...
- Photos, symbols or family rituals are a means of connecting with people, who may have died or who are at a distance from you. Find and enjoy something that represents them and that you remember them by.
- Dare to take a leap of faith by sharing something that may have been a secret for some time.
- Forgive someone who has hurt or misunderstood you and apologise to someone you may have offended. Understand that others do what they do, with the information and resources they have at the time. Most people are doing their best and mean well!
- We ongoingly influence our next generations – act accordingly to what you want to teach them.

Instead of focusing on yourself, or looking at something from one perspective only, try on someone else’s glasses for a change – with clear lenses, not rose-coloured ones.

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