

Online Exclusives

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A New Appreciation of Mother's Day

by Susan Stevens Boucher

Remember the old television commercial when the mother with a horrible cold realizes moms don't get sick days? I had a similar epiphany last Mother's Day when I realized that this Hallmark holiday is never truly going to give me a day off from the responsibilities of motherhood. It only took me five minutes into the day to come to this grand conclusion – right after I finished cleaning the dog puke off my daughter's carpet.

The day did improve. Before various injuries, tears and bad moods kicked in, we managed to squeeze in 10 minutes of heart-warming hand-made cards, a touching poem and a bunch of hand-made "coupons" from my two girls. Never mind that two of the coupons were for trips to the mall and the movies, motivated somewhat by their personal interests, it's safe to say. The other two were for a laundry-free day and for breakfast in bed. Now that's worth paying for.

And I did. By cleaning up the spilled milk on my bedside table and carting my dishes and my daughter's back down to the kitchen after the breakfast in bed coupon was redeemed.

We were half-way through the holiday when I realized that Mother's Day to my 7-year-old meant more Mommy time for her. A special day not for me to indulge in now rare pastimes like reading a good book, or playing the piano, but for me to bestow more attention upon her than on a regular day. All while, of course, attending to her culinary, hygiene, medical, and entertainment needs.

Bedtime brought the usual assortment of challenges. No day off there. "I'm not tired. Can't I stay up later?" "Yes, I washed my hands. Well, sort of." This one fights her cough medicine with crocodile tears. I relent and skip the medicine, knowing it probably means a 3:00 a.m. sleep interruption when her cough wakes both of us. The other one sends me down two flights of stairs for the 100th time that day, for the nighttime CD she "can't sleep without" (never mind that she often does).

But in between the regular chores of motherhood that the day brought, I got to spend an hour playing with my younger daughter, watching her develop her confidence by being the leader of the activities for once. I got to re-affirm that I believe in fairies, and run obstacles courses of her design. I got to tell her, as I do almost every night, that she truly is my sunshine, and smother her face with seven kisses, matched as always by an equal number of return kisses.

And I got to cuddle with my 9-year-old daughter and talk her from sadness (hurt thumb/cough/run-of-the-mill 9-year-old angst) into laughter. I got to bask in the glow of her immense anticipation of getting her ears pierced earlier than originally planned, due to the upcoming end of another stellar school year and general good behavior. And I got to marvel again at the beautiful contradictions of innocence and maturity embodied in her slim frame and quick mind.

In between saying these extended "good-nights" and forcing my obstinate Labrador outside to do her business so hopefully she wouldn't wake me up at 3 a.m., I reflected on the day. I realized that Mother's Day isn't about having a day off from mothering chores after all. It isn't about the gifts, although being characterized in poem as "a newly sprung lilac" is one of the nicer gifts I've ever received.

Mother's Day is not even about being appreciated by your children. It's about appreciating. Mother's Day is for mothers, so we can take a day to look past the demands of the job and appreciate how lucky we are to have the privilege of guiding other human beings through their little lives, and for being loved so wholeheartedly, at least most of the time.

So who really wants a day off from this? This is the job I signed up for, and I'm going to continue enjoying it as long as they let me. And who knows? Maybe as my children get older, I'll even get a proper breakfast in bed.