

VIEWPOINTS

Cancel the Card: Mother's Day Is Silly

By Meg Peterson

I'M SICK OF Mother's Day — it's got to go! It's so obligatory and so phony, operating as it does under the specious guise of noble motives. Love, honor, respect — all very important to a mother — cannot be made mandatory and trotted out on special occasions.

Being the mother of five, I have received my share of elaborately decorated lavender soap and Oil of Olay from young sons persuaded by teachers and peers that Mother had better be honored or the meals might disappear from the table. My daughters, on the other hand, were more practical, or just wanted their efforts appreciated by a wider range of people. They painted pictures and wrote poems, knowing that their handiwork would be taped to the refrigerator until it faded and drooped, or was replaced by next year's oblation.

I'll admit that I got a kick out of these efforts — they were adorable and so were the kids. But they grow up. Santa Claus was a big kick, too, but is not taken very seriously once a child reaches adulthood.

My mother would agree. She is one of those people who thinks Mother's Day is just plain silly. She was a Methodist minister's wife, and way ahead of her time. She seldom wore a hat to church, always bought our spring clothes at post-Easter sales and never sported a corsage on Mother's Day.

And she was suspicious of any holiday whose prime purpose was to sell someone a bill of goods — in this case, flowers and lavender soap. Buying overpriced orchids once a year did not signify filial devotion to her.



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I called her last Mother's Day — not because she expected it, but because her companion would have thought me an unnatural daughter if I hadn't.

"Oh my goodness, dear," was all she said when she heard my greeting. That was her cultivated way of saying, "Didn't we dispense with that baloney long ago?" At age 90, she sticks to her principles.

She might have been pleased to know that our new minister had preached that morning about the church's deepening financial crisis. On Mother's Day? I found it a breath of fresh air that I didn't have to endure a litany of how wonderful we mothers are. Maybe he figured we already knew. I hope the corsaged mothers have forgiven him.

Does this sound un-American? I fear that Mother's Day has become such a ritual in this society that

breaking it is tantamount to treason. It has taken its place beside apple pie and the Stars and Stripes. And the message is loud and clear: Don't defile it, don't step on it and don't question it.

But what I personally find most disturbing about this day is that, despite my protestations, I continue to be undermined by what other people think.

"You mean to say that your daughter hasn't called yet?" said a friend. I replied: "Well, she is very busy, of course, with the baby and all."

Now I'm left wondering just how busy she can be — with only one child. Too busy to pick up the phone . . . And there I go, getting sucked in, along with everyone else.

My other children, who also know my professed attitude, still find themselves swayed by the insidious advertising. (She's the only mother you have — honor her. Don't forget your mother on this special day — she didn't forget you when you needed her.) They feel obligated to do something — if only to tell me they're not going to do something.

My son, Tom, who used to be in the greenhouse business, could always be counted on to deposit a hanging basket on my back stoop each year. That's because he loves plants and gets them wholesale from another friend in the business. But don't get me wrong — I appreciated it.

Last year, however, he decided to practice what I preach. He ignored Mother's Day. I hardly even noticed, since the rest of the immediate world was congratulating me.

It wasn't until July — when I received an unexpected phone call from him — that I figured out what he was up to. "Hey Mom, I just called up to tell you you're great."

"Why?" I sputtered.

"Do I have to have a reason?" he said. "You're great, that's all. And by the way, I have this large fuchsia plant hanging in my apartment. I thought you might like it. It would look great on your sun porch."

Now, doesn't that beat lavender soap?