

This interview was conducted via email for Laura Sullivan Cassidy's [Griever's Ball](https://grieverball.substack.com) website.

I was one of six interviewees. The completed article including all six respondees is here: <https://grieverball.substack.com/p/mothers-day-without-a-mother>

-Robert Zverina
May 2023

1. How many Mother's Days have you spent without your mom? You can answer roughly, abstractly, symbolically, or succinctly.

Almost half my life now and I was born in '69. My mom was there.

2. What are some of the things you've done for yourself or by yourself across the years while the rest of the world (it can seem) is out there celebrating at brunch or whatever?

Honestly, Mother's Day was only ever at best a perfunctory chore. Like maybe I'd get a card. I was a bad son! But then again, my mother grew up in Soviet Czechoslovakia. As the Germans outlawed miracles in Casablanca, so did the Russians nullify Mother's Day, so she wasn't particularly invested in it. Expectations were low all around.

3. How or what does the day feel like to you, lately? Any plans for this year?

Since the precedent of non-event status had been set, I barely notice it. Which is terrible because I'm married and have a very sweet mother-in-law for whom I should do more. I'm sending her a book this year. It documents an ambitious art project completed by her daughter over several months in 2021. I think she'll really like it. I would've sent it anyway, but I need to remind myself that maybe Mother's Day means more to her than it does to me so the timing matters.

4. Have you noticed that folks are more careful about throwing out big, presumptuous happy ideas via social media on Mother's Day? Have you noticed more posts that address those who ostensibly and very likely aren't going to have the best day? What's your read or reaction on this growing awareness? How does it make you feel? What do you notice—about yourself or anything else—when scrolling social media on or around Mother's Day in general?

I mostly avoid social media. That said, I wouldn't want or expect a trigger warning every time someone wants to say Happy Mother's Day. The observance started as a pacifist initiative but was soon co-opted as consumer spectacle, and social media just adds another layer of hype to a media environment already saturated with holiday ads for florists, greeting cards, and restaurants.

5. Would you do away with Mother's Day and maybe Father's Day too, if you could? Would you replace them with anything? Why or why not?

I propose POLG Day--Parent(s) Or Legal Guardian Day. This would combine Mother's and Father's Days into one and add recognition for those previously unsung. By having one all-inclusive observance, there's less chance anyone will feel left out, whether it's in celebration of the living or remembrance of the dead.

6. Do you have a favorite memory of Mother's Day, or your mom, that you'd like to share?

I could write a book about my mom and probably will, but one moment sits like a diamond on velvet in my memory.

She was getting too frail to drive herself, so I was chauffeuring her around Minneapolis on a brilliant but brisk January day. ("Brisk" is what they call it in Minnesota when it's 30 below.) Before going back to her assisted living apartment, we parked by a frozen lake, windshield sunshine warming the car. She'd beaten the odds but was living on borrowed time. Since her terminal diagnosis, she spoke with no filter and was in a summing up mood. Life had been hard but she had no regrets and was ready for whatever came next. Then she fell silent, nothing more to say, eyes closed, smiling into the sun.

Eight months later I was with her at the end, one hand on her forehead, the other on her wrist, feeling her pulse trail off in six unburdening beats, fading like the footsteps of someone walking away.

7. If you could do anything at all - outside the bounds of physics and possibility and whatever else - this year on Mother's Day, what would you do?

Hire skywriters to write MOTHERS FOR PEACE above the Pentagon.

Because wikipedia tells me:

The modern holiday was first celebrated in 1907, when Anna Jarvis held the first Mother's Day service of worship at Andrews Methodist Episcopal Church in Grafton, West Virginia.... Her campaign to make Mother's Day a recognized holiday in the United States began in 1905, the year her mother, Ann Reeves Jarvis, died. Ann Jarvis had been a peace activist who cared for wounded soldiers on both sides of the American Civil War, and created Mother's Day Work Clubs to address public health issues. She and another peace activist and suffragette Julia Ward Howe had been urging for the creation of a "Mother's Day For Peace" where mothers would ask that their husbands and sons were no longer killed in wars. 40 years before it became an official holiday, Ward Howe had made her Mother's Day Proclamation in 1870, which called upon mothers of all nationalities to band together to promote the "amicable settlement of international questions, the great and general interests of peace.