

Send Your Mother a Cow!



Sunday May 9 is Mother's Day in the United States. Mother's Day is celebrated in at least 160 other countries around the world, as well, although not necessarily on the same day as the USA. The "Mother's Day Proclamation" by Julia Ward Howe was one of the early calls to celebrate Mother's Day in the United States. Written in 1870, Howe's Mother's Day Proclamation was a pacifist reaction to the carnage of the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War. In 1912, Anna Jarvis trademarked the phrases "second Sunday in May" and "Mother's Day", and created the Mother's Day International Association.

Nine years after the first official Mother's Day, commercialization of the U.S. holiday became so rampant that Anna Jarvis herself became a major opponent of what the holiday had become and spent all her inheritance and the rest of her life fighting what she saw as an abuse of the celebration. She criticized the practice of purchasing greeting cards, which she saw as a sign of being too lazy to write a personal letter, and she finally said that she "wished she would have never started the day because it became so out of control."



Mother's Day continues to this day to be one of the commercially most successful U.S. occasions.

According to the National Restaurant Association, Mother's Day is now the most popular day of the year to dine out at a restaurant in the United States. According to

IBISWorld, a publisher of business research, Americans will spend approximately \$2.6 billion on flowers, \$1.53 billion on pampering gifts—like spa treatments—and another \$68 million on greeting cards.

As a mother myself, I can't protest if my children and husband give me a day off from household chores, flowers, small gifts or even greeting cards. I have to admit that I like all these things. But since my children grew up in a Rotary family, they have a slightly different outlook on Mother's Day. They are well aware that in too many places in the world, children wish to honor their mothers, but they may not have the means to do so in tangible ways.

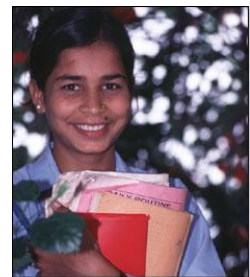
So we have started a tradition in our family of honoring family members (mother, father, grandma, and anyone else who deserves to be honored) by giving a gift in their name to one of several organizations that does some good in the world. We recognize that each one of us has more than enough "stuff." We in our family are blessed with an abundance of material goods, everything we need and much more besides. We don't need more "things," but there are too many people who do.

One of our favorite organizations (outside of Rotary itself) is Heifer International, commonly called the Heifer Project, an organization whose mission is to work with communities to end hunger and poverty by giving families a hand-up, not just a hand-out.

Here's how the program works: You donate to Heifer International in the name of your mother (or another loved one) so Heifer can purchase livestock. They give the animal, or animals, to a family in one of 128 countries, and train them in animal husbandry, improving their nutrition and generating income in sustainable ways. They mail you a gift card with your donation receipt (or if you prefer, they email an e-card with your electronic receipt) so you can tell your loved one that you've honored them with a Heifer gift.

Heifer refers to the animals as "living loans" because in exchange for their livestock and training, the family that receives it agrees to give at least one of its animal's offspring to another family in need. They call it Passing on the Gift. As people share their animals' offspring with others – along with their knowledge, resources, and skills – an expanding network of hope, dignity, and self-reliance is created that reaches around the globe. Their emphasis on long-term solutions for community involvement distinguishes their work from that of global relief organizations.

Today, millions of people who were once hungry will be nourished by milk, eggs and fresh vegetables. Families who for generations knew only poverty will be building new homes and starting businesses. Children who once headed out to the fields to do backbreaking work will be heading into schoolrooms to learn to read. And people who never thought they'd be in a position to help someone else will be experiencing the joy of charitable giving.



Heifer has been giving four-footed (or sometimes two-footed, six-footed, or rooted – see the next paragraph) solutions to hunger and poverty for 66 years. In 1939 a Midwestern (USA) farmer named Dan

West was ladling out rations of milk to hungry children in Spain during the Spanish Civil War when he realized that “these children don’t need a cup, they need a cow.” West, who was serving as a relief worker for his church, was forced to decide who would receive the limited rations and who wouldn’t – literally, who would live and who would die. This kind of aid, he knew, would never be enough. So he returned home to form Heifers for Relief. In 1944, the first shipment of 17 heifers left York, Pennsylvania, USA, bound for Puerto Rico, to families whose malnourished children had never tasted milk. Why heifers? These are young cows that haven’t yet given birth – making them perfect not only for supplying a continued source of milk, but also for supplying a continued source of support.



Today, heifers are not the only livestock Heifer gives. Not every culture uses dairy products; some climates are better for other animals; some families do not have a way to take care of a cow. In addition to cows, you can give sheep, goats, llamas, water buffalo, pigs, rabbits, geese, ducks, chickens, honey bees, or even trees. (OK, trees aren’t animals, but you can still give them.) You can choose which animal you want to give or simply donate wherever the need is greatest.



In addition to training the recipients, Heifer has a number of Learning Centers, or “living classrooms,” for education in the United States. They offer tours, Global Village immersion experiences, single and multi-day educational

programs, service-learning events and more. Heifer International provides sustainable development education resources and opportunities for all ages. Heifer Education offers children, adults, students and teachers a chance to better understand global hunger and poverty – and come away with a re-energized determination to be part of the solution to world poverty.

We Levensons think a gift to Heifer International is a great way to honor one's mother, or anyone else you love, with a gift that keeps on giving. It doesn't contribute to excess spending, make us fat (like dessert at a restaurant), add waste to overburdened landfills, or collect dust at the back of the closet. It's a great way to say "I love you" to your own mother, and someone else's mother, too.



