Mother's Day Wishes During Peak Times

Contributed by Elaine Kost
10 May 2009

A box sits on the table before me filled with a couple of tops; some beaded necklaces from the '50s and lots of pictures. It's addressed to my daughter Jennifer who I haven't seen in over two years. This Mothers Day I have more wishes than one.

Recently I flew to Apache Junction, Arizona where my mom and dad lived for many years.
Mom died just over a year ago and my trip was to bring back some belongings as well as help my brother make the home look like his.

Whenever I visit the great desert region, I stand in awe of the Superstition Mountains, so firmly grounded, their rigid ridges appear like stairs to the sky and when the sun sets behind them, shadows are cast to show the dark and dangerous side. Their beauty is the superstition that only nature knows.

Some of what I brought home with me were cards, letters and drawings made by my two daughters over the years that my mom kept. It shouldn't have surprised me when they both asked for a couple of my mom's tops. Memories are simple treasures.

One box is ready to be sent. I didn't include a note, since she is expecting it. She told my other daughter she would reimburse me for the postage. It hurts to think how little she knows me, but I seldom think of me when I think of her, and because of the changes I've made in my life, she sees me as depressing to be around, angry and too serious. Instead I feel like a book underneath a dusty cover that has been removed to expose a beautiful new story. My unnecessary ways of living have vanished with the dust and I appreciate life and all the complexities it has to offer.

Her last visit was with her boyfriend at the time, on my husband's 50th birthday, October 2006. Since then, she married, we celebrated our 30year-wedding anniversary and she celebrated her first. I retired after 30 years and now too have reached the 50 and older club. We have so many memories without her and we don't understand why.

As I type this, our lives are changing rapidly. With high unemployment, and record foreclosures, consumer spending is down and global warming is heating up. Tent cities are beginning to cover the landscape as a colored version of the old black and white photos, only now with more people.

I worry as a mother knowing my daughter is not prepared for a future that will be very different than ever before. She denies that things are as real as we tell her. She won't begin to discuss the changes she might make to better prepare herself. Instead she would rather occupy her time by watching silly sitcoms, going to NASCAR races and most recently visiting Las Vegas for her one year wedding anniversary, where her My Space showed pictures of her with plastic gorillas.

Since September 11, 2001 my life became clearer and my purpose for living changed. I started to read more history and began to connect the dots with many current events that led up to that day. I started to see how the mainstream media was a deterrent in my capacity to grow. I uncovered lies that as an American I believed to be true. I became aware of my surroundings. I took control of my life and consciously began to make changes for a more sustainable future for all of us.

It wasn't until we drifted apart that I started reading and learning more. Spiritual books opened my eyes to accept what is and not to separate the good and bad. The history books have been nothing like the ones I read in school, and I now understand that history does in fact repeat itself, empires do fall, sometimes quicker than they're built. The how to books have shown me how to learn from my mistakes and not to be afraid to make them. I wish there was a book on how to make my daughter talk to me, because I can't learn from what I don't know.

At first, I hated the fact that I learned so much—too much to consciously deny. It was easier living what I believed to be the "normal life." We shopped because there was a sale, not that we needed what we bought. We ate out occasionally at all the wrong places, such as fast food, even if it was slow to digest. We didn't think about how we got where we were going, and the resources we used to get there. We were shown the fast lane, but I soon ran out of speed. Off went the T.V. and on came the picture.

We now grow half of what we eat and I appreciate the taste of real food because I realize the hard work it takes to put it on my table. We tripled up on our mortgage payments and now own our home on five acres. We downsized to one car, and gave Jennifer a good deal on the other one. We have demonstrated the ways in which one can make changes for the better. Get out of debt, find a career that is satisfying to your soul as well as your checkbook and live simply. There are so many new and exciting careers that are beginning to develop out of this mess we are in, and I know how freeing it has been for me to let go.

I have stopped going in circles and have discovered a path to happiness, and it doesn't cost money. I realized no matter how hard you work and play by the rules, the American Dream has no ending. I was a hamster stuck on a wheel going around and around.

Every day now I wake to awareness of my influence on the earth. I place my feet lightly on the ground so fewer things know I'm here. I notice the different birds that come and go with the seasons and how the trees handle the stress from weather patterns we're now seeing.

Our daughters grew up in the country where our nine acres blended with the neighbors. We never felt the need to shelter our children, they were free to roam and explore. We taught them to trust others but never be afraid to question.

Home-schooled for the first couple years Jennifer learned to apply what was in her books to everyday life. Questions were answered with our knowledge as well as others. Simple things like dictionaries and rulers were used. Math was added, subtracted and multiplied by long hand. She appreciated what she ate because she knew the work it took to produce.

My husband and I felt it was important to give our children a strong foundation to survive in a world that's as amazing as troubled. Those days they were young and they questioned everything, but trusted our answers. Now I'm searching for answers to who my daughter is.

With no "how to" instructions, we taught her what she needed to know and gave advice based on factual information. We were honest in what we told her and felt this was our responsibility as parents, no matter what the outcome. I understand now it would have been much easier to tell her what she wanted to hear.

Both my husband and I have tried to share with her some simple facts of how our lives have changed and how it has affected us in our plans for retirement. I believed after giving 30 years to a company, I would be able to join the rest of the retirees, who only do what they want to; work or otherwise. I have always dreamed of places that now I will never

see. I keep my travels closer to home and am thankful to have the beautiful Pacific Northwest in my backyard. We visit the ocean two hours away, which is a wonderful vacation for us. I believe sacrifices come from all walks of life, and I owe to our future generations to wisely use the resources that are left. I believe the small changes I make to my life will have a large impact on theirs.

I know my parents wanted a better life for me and they both worked hard for me to have it. What parent doesn't want to see their children happy? Maybe if I believed she was happy, I could let her go. But my motherly instincts tell me otherwise. I've trusted in these since the day she was born. They stick with you like Velcro to a "Funny" yarn scarf. As you try to detach one, it becomes a part of the other.

I would have loved a book this Mother's Day on how to prepare our children for a very different future. So many books and essays over the past few years about Peak resources, reports from scientists who are speaking out about the decline of our lives as we know them -- why is this viewed as a negative subject? Should we be splitting up what's negative and positive? Why not educate them on the changes that we need to make and the opportunities that go along with them. Is it not positive to look toward what we can do instead of what we can't? Is the way we've been living sustainable for all of us? Is it right that we are 4% of the world's population using 25% of its resources?

I know there is a need for such a book; I have recently spoken to other parents who are arguing amongst themselves about whether to tell their children the truth. I hear the men say, "They need to know I've lost my job and they won't be getting all the things they got before, and hey, how bout some help in starting a garden, I'm getting older and can't do it all and besides its something fun we can do together."

As a mom I've tried hard not to enable, though at times I know I have. We've all made mistakes at parenting and no child is perfect either. My mom wasn't everything I needed when I needed it, and it took me a long time to realize what she did teach me. Today I wish she were here to teach me more. The lessons are there if we're willing to learn.

My parents both lived through the Blitz in London during World War II, and my mom spoke of it in detail just a year before she passed. My daughters listened to the sacrifices that were made and tears filled their eyes as my mom laughed about what she called "the good old days."

She told them of the time she grabbed her dad's gas mask instead of hers, it made noises as she breathed. Her "Mum" and her laughed while tucked together in the dugout that my Granddad built in their backyard. She spoke of Christmases where her sister and her got one doll and some fruit in their stockings. My daughters too have acknowledged: some of the best times where when we had the least.

I always wondered why my mom never talked about the war with me when I was younger. I understand now, we as parents have tough decisions to make on whether to shelter our children or give them the truth and let them decide.

One of my favorite gifts from Jennifer is an Anne Geddes picture of two babies, one in each wing of a stork with the words of a Katharine Hadley verse:

The decision to have a child

Is to accept that your heart

Will forever walk about

Outside of your body.

It hangs above a small wooden heart painted with the words, “You are the wind beneath my wings.” This was a gift from my mom.

I love Jennifer with all my heart and it’s hard to accept the relationship that I have with her now. I only hope that someday she will understand the reason for me telling her what I know. I believe we all gain from being armed with knowledge, as the earth will go on with or without us.

I eventually got the note with the check for the postage. It reminded me once again how little she knows me. At least I got to hear her voice when I left her a message to void out the check. If only she knew it’s not the money I need, but her love.

* * * * *

Elaine Kost lives on a farm near Eugene, Oregon. Her husband David Kost authored a piece in Culture Change last summer, "Off the sidelines and in the game: peak oil preparedness" which you can access at

culturechange.org