

Hyun Jin Moon's Family Peace Association: The seeds of Mother's Day were planted during the Civil War

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Mother's Day in the United States, and in several nations throughout the world, is traditionally celebrated on the second Sunday of May, which primarily involves honoring all mothers and remembering that they freely offer themselves to their children and families each day. The story behind the establishment of Mother's Day as a national holiday is ingrained in American history, but many Americans are not too familiar with the history behind the holiday. This holiday, as it was established in the U.S., began as one daughter's effort to complete the unfulfilled dream of her mother who wanted to create a fitting memorial for all mothers.

The seeds of this story were planted during the time of the American Civil War, which was the most devastating war in the history of the United States, primarily because we were at war with ourselves. Around 620,000 boys and men died as a result of the Civil War. This is the greatest number of Americans that have died in any war the country has been involved in throughout its existence. The nation was divided and the war brought sheer destruction - not just with physical structures within the cities and the farmland in the rural areas, but it created deeply ingrained and long-lasting emotional scars that would take decades of healing.

During this war, and afterwards, those who were left to pick up the pieces had to deal with the physical loss of family members, as well as the deep emotional loss of loved ones. The price of ending slavery in this country came at an incredibly great cost. It was during this time that many women began to form women's friendship clubs for the purpose of healing the emotional wounds left open within the devastated nation. Even before the war, Ann Marie Reeves Jarvis was one of those active women who organized a number of "Mothers Day Work Clubs" in her local area of Taylor County, West Virginia, to combat the unsanitary circumstances and poor health conditions that contributed to a high mortality rate among children in the Appalachian area of West Virginia.

Sadly, Mother Jarvis lost eight of her eleven children before they reached the age of seven as they died of diseases like diphtheria, measles, and typhoid fever. With the loss of so many children, Jarvis and her brother who was a doctor, tried to help communities in the area reduce the frequency of such childhood diseases as well as unsanitary conditions. Her brother, Dr. James Reeves, was known for his work to limit the spread of typhoid fever in West Virginia, and he was able to provide valuable health advice to club members. The clubs also helped educate mothers about improving sanitary conditions to cut down the incidence of disease and infant mortality, and raised money to purchase medicine for poorer families.

These social action brigades, which later became known as Mothers Friendship Clubs, also taught mothers the importance of boiling water and demonstrated how to prevent food from spoiling, as well as other antiseptic practices. They also helped to provide nursing care for the sick, and arranged proper medical attention for those who were suffering from tuberculosis. When the Civil War started, Ann Jarvis' Mothers' Friendship Clubs had to adapt, and alter their efforts to meet the changing and conflicting realities of the war. Mother Jarvis insisted the clubs declare their neutrality so that they could provide aid to either the Confederate or the Union soldiers.

During the Civil War, the state of Virginia split apart, just like the nation divided. Landowners in the western portion, who owned very few or no slaves, did not want to separate from the Union as did slave owners who lived in the eastern section of the state. Due to the war, western Virginia seceded from the state of Virginia after the eastern landowners pulled Virginia out of the Union. Then, this area became a

crossroads for both Confederate and Union armies that were either advancing into enemy territory or retreating from it, almost serving as a doormat for the movement of the troops. In essence, West Virginia became a microcosm of the Civil War.

Within such an environment, Mother Jarvis gathered four of these clubs together and requested that they pledge to one another that their friendship and goodwill would not become victims of the war that had started to rip apart the nation. She asked the clubs:

"To make a sworn-to agreement between members that friendship and goodwill should obtain in the clubs for the duration and aftermath of the war. That all efforts to divide the churches and lodges should not only be frowned upon but prevented."

It was important that the clubs remained neutral, as it enabled them to provide nursing assistance to soldiers from both sides during the divisive and destructive conflict. Through the leadership of Mother Jarvis, the clubs provided food and clothing, and nursed the wounded soldiers from both Union and Confederate forces. They also helped directly when various diseases would break out in the ranks of either military unit. Mother Jarvis was an exceptional woman who did more than simply survive the death and destruction of the Civil War in West Virginia, and it is estimated that these women's groups saved many lives.

The area around Taylor County near where the Jarvis home was located, served as a staging area for both Confederate and Union troops and supplies to be shipped in either direction because of the Wheeling-Staution Pike railroad. Confederates made their way up into Ohio and Pennsylvania and Union troops used the way as a "backdoor to the South." The local area at one time served as Gen. George B. McClellan's headquarters. Under such extreme conditions, on May 1, 1864, Ann Marie and her husband, Granville, gave birth to a daughter whom they named Anna Jarvis. Ann Jarvis through her mother's love and her unselfish attitude, hard work, and sacrifice would prove to be the inspiration for her daughter when Anna grew up and became the founder of Mother's Day in the U.S.

When the war was over, Ann Jarvis and her community-based Mother's groups proved instrumental in promoting the fragile peace between formerly divided friends and neighbors. They served as a healing element within the polarized community and worked as peacemakers as they encouraged families to work out their differences and resentment brought about by the war. By 1868, Jarvis had conceived of a family day picnic which she called "Mother's Friendship Day" in order to honor all mothers, with a deeper goal of reuniting politically divided families. Her ultimate goal was to create a lasting memorial regarding the value of mothers.

Unfortunately, Mother Jarvis passed away on May 9, 1905, just over two years after her husband passed away. At her mother's gravesite, Anna recalled a prayer that Ann Marie, offered during a lesson on "Mothers in the Bible." Her mother had taught Sunday school in Grafton, West Virginia for seven years, and when Anna was twelve years old, she remembered that her mom's concluding prayer (essentially paraphrased) was: "I hope that someone, sometime will found a memorial mother's day commemorating her for the matchless service she renders to humanity in every field of life."

Anna's brother Claude heard his sister reflecting on their mother and the dream expressed in that prayer, and heard the pledge that Anna Jarvis made that day at the gravesite: "by the grace of God, you shall have that Mother's Day." As a result of years of determined effort by her loving daughter, Anna Jarvis, out of deep respect and genuine love, worked tirelessly after her mother died, to carry on her mother's work to create a Mother's Day memorial. Finally, her determined efforts achieved ultimate success on May 9, 1914, when President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation declaring the first national Mother's Day.

Anna Jarvis may have expressed it best when she once explained her purpose in establishing such a day:

"To revive the dormant filial love and gratitude we owe to those who gave us birth. To be a home-tie for the absent, To obliterate family estrangement... To make us better children by getting us closer to the hearts of our good mothers... To brighten the lives of good mothers. To have them know we appreciate them, though we do not show it as often as we ought... Mother's Day is to remind us of our duty before it is too late. This day is intended that we may make new resolutions for a more active thought to our dear mothers. By words, gifts, acts of affection, and in every way possible, give her pleasure, and make her heart glad every day, and constantly keep in memory Mother's Day."

It is definitely hard to repay all that a good and loving mother has given to her children and to other loved ones, but Anna Jarvis worked very hard in attempting to offer her gratitude to her mother, and gave all of us an opportunity to say thank you to our Moms "by words, gifts, acts of affection, and in every way possible..."

Happy Mother's Day to all Moms everywhere!