



Holding hands, during the final days of Breniman’s mother’s life last June.

Mother’s Day: A meaningful letter creates an opportunity for depth and a keepsake

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Last year, a CNN report noted that consumers will spend an average of \$180 per mother. In our age of Facebook birthday wishes, text message connections, overbooked lives and overly busy schedules, we often miss the most important element of life — deep personal connection. This begins in the family, and when well-watered and tended to grows to flourish when cultivated.

A new, old day

With Jarvis’s original sentiment in mind, here are a few ideas for this Mother’s Day:

Write a letter: Skip the \$7 card and create a meaningful letter that conveys your heart. It’s worth so much more in sentiment, meaning and creates an opportunity for depth and a keepsake.

Handmade Mother’s Day coupon books: Make mom a set of coupons redeemable for activities she’d like. Examples could be a meal cooked together, a day of activities of her choice, vouchers for blocks of time with phones turned off. Be creative and focus on ways to create time together without distraction.

Go somewhere and sit: Astoria and the North Coast have plenty of spots to sit and take in the sights and scenes, both near and far, urban and natural. Enjoy a familiar location or branch out and find a new park or trail in a nearby town together. Sit. Talk. Just be. These are the times

you’ll cherish and the conversations you’ll remember.

Grab the buckets and go: With next Saturday-Wednesday’s minus tides, set a date for razor clamming and mussel collection together and feast upon the bounty together afterward. (Note: Be sure to check the Oregon Department of Agriculture’s Shellfish Hotline.)

Plan a trip: Go somewhere. Just you and Mom and soak in the experience of the time together My mother and I did this in Astoria for her final birthday and I’ll always cherish the time and place.

And since this works both ways, this isn’t only encouragement for sons and daughters, mothers can learn from and implement these strategies, as well. If you’re a mother, take the lead, make space and create memories and relational depth that’ll grow over time, encounters full of screen-free presence that will be remembered.

Ponder in your heart these things, and how you allocate your time ... because in the end, that’s the only thing that matters.

See Mother’s Day for what it was, like Jarvis did.

Aaron Breniman is a freelance writer and wilderness skills instructor based near Mount Hood. When he’s not talking about outdoor safety or what he’s reading, he can most likely be found fishing small lakes and streams or enjoying mountain sunrises and sunsets bathed in silence and solitude.

Living an isolated life

Dear Annie: I am an older gay man. The bullying started when I was young. The boys in the neighborhood didn’t want me around because I was lousy at sports. The girls didn’t want any boys around while they were playing. When I started school, it wasn’t any different. Bullying increased with junior high, and high school was the worst.

To cope, I avoided socializing with people. I didn’t attend any high school functions. Consequently, I never really learned how to be around people. Later, I would usually say or do something that was frowned upon. That just made me isolate myself more. I started drinking as a coping mechanism, but of course, that was no help. My lowered inhibitions made me do stupid things, which again would alienate people, so I avoided outside contacts even more. I would drink alone, which led to legal problems. Eventually, I lost the privilege to drive. Living in a city with no public transportation means I am isolated again. That isolation also meant that I put on a lot of weight. After seeing how I looked, I lost even more confidence. The only good thing is that I’ve started to lose some of the excess weight because I have to walk everywhere I go. I’m still obese, but it’s not as bad as it once was.

I watched my siblings as they dated, fell in love and married. The kids and grandkids followed. I watched the kids come in and happily relay the news of their days to their parents, whether it was hitting a home run in the game or some kid getting sick at school. Though my siblings would instruct them to tell me what had happened, too, by the time they got around to it, the enthusiasm was gone. They were just relaying information rather than sharing their lives.

When holidays came, I saw the excitement on everyone’s

faces, especially as the parents discussed how best to surprise the kids. The school plays and the games and all the other activities were fun to go to when I was asked. But the kids just looked at me as the uncle. I wasn’t someone they thought about including.

I wish I had lived a different life. I think I could have loved someone. I never had the chance to meet and share anything with anyone. At times, I considered suicide but rejected that idea right away. I didn’t want to put the family through that. I sometimes hope for a fatal disease — something natural that would end my life. So, now I just wait. I’ve accepted the fact that I will never get the chance to love someone or find someone to love me. Sorry this is so long. I actually feel better now. — *Just Existing*

Dear Just Existing: Today is a new beginning. You took the time to write to me, and you’ve acknowledged that by expressing your feelings and experiences you “actually feel better.” I have great hope for you. It is time for you to find a wise and compassionate therapist with your best interests at heart. You sound like a very special person who has been living with unnecessary pain for way too long.

I am sorry that you endured bullying in school. That can be traumatic, especially at such a young age. And it is all too common to turn to alcohol, which has become its own problem. Check out Alcoholics Anonymous. Their 12-step program and group support are frequently lifesaving. It can be comforting to know that others have suffered similar slights as you have.

Once you find the right therapist, and stop drinking alone, there is a good chance that someone will fall in love with you — starting with yourself.

It is never too late to begin living your life rather than just existing.



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