



On **Mother's Day**: Things I would tell my mom...if only I could

By
Brenda Lee

When I was just nine years old, my mother tragically left this world. Growing up without her was difficult, but those struggles barely register in the scheme of all we've lost. If I could give a voice to the hollow canyon of my incredulous memory, it would surely echo:

"Mom, I'm sorry I referred to you as 'mother' for years after you left, for in my anger, despair and grief, "mom" seemed too endearing. I wondered, "How could you abandon me?" Only the wisdom that comes with age could provide the answer.

There are days when I wake and hear the birds singing and it takes me back to our farmhouse in rural Pennsylvania where lush green vegetation enveloped the hillsides and morning mist danced upon my cheek. I recall the sun shining through the window, reflecting off our kitchen's bright yellow walls. Yellow, your favorite color, medicated your ailing spirits, didn't it? As your youngest, I intuitively sensed the loneliness and isolation you experienced as a stay-at-home mom. I too adopted your frustration and desire to become part of something bigger.

As a teen, I longed to share with you my hopes and dreams for the future, but I could not. As a young adult, I wanted to call you countless times to say: "Hey, mom, I'm picking out my wedding dress on Saturday. Can you go with me?" "What's that recipe for the delectable apple pie you used to make?" "I'm going into labor now. Better get here fast!"

But there was only piercing silence on the other end.

When I became a mother at twenty-eight, I hungered even more for your gentle touch and beautiful smile. So many nights I cradled my infant son and whispered, "I love you," imagining how it might feel to hear you offer the same glorious gift to me, just one more time. Deprived of a female role model to offer much-needed advice, I immersed myself into becoming the best mother I could for my young son. Still, there was a void. I knew you would not hear his first words, see his first steps or stroke his smooth skin as the two of you walked hand-in-hand. My heart, full of joy after creating a miraculous new life, also ached relentlessly. My precious future would never know my precious past.

My son has grown into a bright, mature teen now, full of wonder and compassion. As he waters the mums he gave me last Mother's Day, I recall the fields of yellow dandelions dotting the open fields on our old homestead. In my childhood innocence, I tediously picked the best ones, presenting them to you just to see your smile. Your love of horticulture and the gentle way you nurtured me during my early childhood lives on through your beautiful grandchild, my beloved.

The same sun that shone into your kitchen thirty-five years ago peered through my kitchen window today, warmly penetrating my red hair with microscopic precision. The reflection reminded me of the numerous times you dyed your hair to cover the emerging gray. Now, those gray hairs are becoming my own, and I face a similar dilemma, to dye or not to dye.

To die or not to die. I will not die like you. I will not surrender to that which feels unnatural.

There is no grave to visit, no body that rests in peace, for you *symbolically* died. Your God, Jehovah, took the place of our natural bond. Your newfound religion precluded you from truly knowing your daughter, and because I would not adopt your faith, shunning seemed your only viable, "loving" option. And so you did, shun me, for the next 25 years. No calls, no letters, no love.

My head understands your religious mantra to become "no part of this world" and to "avoid association with nonbelievers." I too marched the drill for years. However, no teenager should ever be forced to choose between family and freedom. Your heart once beat next to mine in utero, but now our hearts beat a generation removed.

Sometimes I catch a glimpse of you—the eighty-year old woman I see now only in pictures, frail and wrinkled but full of conviction, just like me. I will always embrace you—alive in my memory, yet untouchable. Most importantly, I forgive you, for surely you must feel as much pain as I.

I pray that when you pass from this life, you'll behold dandelions and the sun shining into a yellow yonder. Although I won't be able to hold your hand when that time comes, in your final breath, know that I love you. And I hope you will allow yourself to feel incredibly proud of the woman—the mother—I've become. After all, I am who I am, because of you.

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"Out of the Cocoon: A Young Woman's Courageous Flight from the Grip of a Religious Cult"

Brenda Lee began writing her inspiring memoir, *Out of the Cocoon: A Young Woman's Courageous Flight from the Grip of a Religious Cult* (RDR Publishers, 2006) at the age of 41. Brenda's mother was also 41 when she abandoned her Methodist faith and joined a divisive religious sect. Brenda lost not only her mother but also her brother, sister, four nephews and niece at a time when she was too young to influence the course of their lives. Through her courageous story, she wants to help others cope with loss and hopes to underscore the devastating effects of intolerance.

This Mother's Day, let's appreciate how important family is in shaping the person we become. Brenda firmly believes that forgiving those who have wronged us is essential for our own well-being and growth, and when people won't accept *us*, then acceptance of anything outside our control is liberating. For more information about *Out of the Cocoon* or to send Brenda Lee your comments, please visit her website at www.outofthecocoon.net.

Please feel free to share Brenda Lee's *unedited* and *entire* dedication with everyone you know. Knowledge is power!