

Headline: Mother Nature's Day

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The definition of what a mother should be is no longer limited to those who bear and raise children.

Contemporary parenting now also recognizes those who, at one point, became a mother to a family member, or to friends, their dogs or even a significant other.

This Mother's Day, I wish to celebrate a different kind of mother.

We call her Mother Nature. We all have the same mother in her, but, unfortunately, many do not see her as such.

It is difficult to measure her love, but it is best said in the Bible.

"Love is patient."

I have never seen anyone who is more patient with us than nature. Every day, she finds new ways to flourish and to survive.

She understands that, like most living things, we, too, take some time to grow.

The slower the pace, the greater the change. She is always present, and sends little reminders that even if we never listen, she always speaks to us.

"Love is kind."

When I suffered depression, a Japanese doctor told me I should go out for an hour just to commune with nature. I was advised to walk barefoot on the grass occasionally, and hug a tree.

This is called naturing. Immersing ourselves in nature makes us happier and less stressful, increases our creativity and makes us feel alive.

Nature has a profound impact on our wellbeing. But most of the time, we neglect her and prefer to consort with technology. Mother Nature is not only kind, she makes us kinder, too.

"Love does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."

There are more deaths from war, famine, crime and diseases than there are from earthquakes, typhoons, droughts and tsunamis. Natural disasters are not Mother Nature's wrath, but the consequences of what we are doing to her.

The forces of nature have incredible power, but they do not handpick those who abuse her. In Mother Nature's eyes, we are all equal.

"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."

I grew up in a small city where progress was synonymous with erecting more buildings, investing in malls and altering the landscape.

For a long time, we believed that, by degrading nature that way, the economy will grow and help us fulfill human demands. But societies have become at risk of resource depletion from indiscriminate farming, mining, fishing and fossil fuel extraction.

Even a resource as ubiquitous as water is running out; we are consuming it faster than our planet is able to replenish it.

Now, we're learning that Mother Nature does not belong to us. If anything, we belong to her.

I think we are too focused on achieving heaven and avoiding hell in the afterlife that we often forget we create quasi-versions of them here on earth.

Heaven is every glorious sunrise and sunset, or days with rainbows, trees bearing fruits, the scent of wet leaves after the rain, which is nature's unending music for those who are willing to listen.

Hell is when we lynch animals for sport, when we destroy forests in the name of expansion, when we exploit resources to exhaustion, when we dump trash into the ocean, when animals become extinct because they have become coveted decorative or luxury items.

Green is never the color of greed. The irony is that we have become the chief enablers in the destruction of our own home.

I always tell my daughter that the greatest love story is not between Romeo and Juliet, but between human beings and Mother Nature.

We are loved more than we can ever imagine, but this love is unrequited and abusive. Humans are raping and degrading nature, all for the sake of modern conveniences.

We pave mountains for parking spaces. We cut trees and clear out the land just to build shopping malls and factories. We eat more than what we can consume, and buy more than what we can afford.

What we do is not out of habit but more out of ignorance. One of the greatest contributors to gas emissions is, in fact, agriculture.

Eat less meat every week and you will help curb climate change. Or shop at secondhand stores and you will help minimize the billions of tons of textiles that go to waste every year due to fast fashion.

Plastic pollution is everywhere — in oceans, rivers, landfills. Sadly, much of that waste is impossible to recycle, but we can opt for simple, sustainable solutions like using reusable items instead of single-use plastic ones.

Something as easy as carpooling with family or friends enables us to cut down the number of cars on the road. Fewer cars equate to less carbon and gas pollution.

These are little things we can do every day that will have a great impact on our environment.

Mother Nature does not care about politics. She does not keep tabs on who's winning the debate between environmentalists and climate change skeptics. She merely persists, hoping that one day we will come around.

I know greener options are not always the most convenient solutions. I beat myself up whenever I forget my ecobag, or enjoy smoked salmon sushi, or buy a brand-new book.

But I've realized that my own attempts at zero waste, minimalism and being vegan are not perfection but progress, no matter how slow.

I believe we should find ways to let nature rest and heal. We are only here temporarily, but nature will be here long after you and I have passed on.

Education is crucial for us to help understand what's at stake. And being aware, in turn, will allow us to make simple choices for a healthier planet.

This year, I'm celebrating Mother Nature on Mother's Day not by buying gifts, but by changing personal habits. If done by many more of us, such changes can prove significant.

So much damage has been done, but, with will, determination and love, there is a lot more we can do to give back to Mother Nature.

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Demsen N. Gomez, 28, is a vegan once a week.