



# Dealing with Mother's Day without mom

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Caryn Brooks, For The Associated Press

Amy Burke lost her mother three years ago, soon after her 25th birthday. The Baltimore resident thinks about her mother every day and though she's sad, she says she has her grief in check except for one annoying time of the year — Mother's Day.

"It's so in your face," she says. "The advertisements, the people talking about it." Three years in and she still doesn't know how to deal with it.

Kathy Morgan of Phoenix, Ariz., lost her mom 20 years ago. "I still get bummed out, angry, sad, lonely, you name it, when Mother's Day comes around," she says.

"In the first few years following her death, I used to get very resentful of the whole occasion. How could everyone else be celebrating? Don't they know I don't have a mother? How unfair! It didn't seem to matter that, at the time, I was the mother of two small children myself, or there were other mothers in my life with whom I could spend the day. I wanted my mother."

Burke and Morgan aren't alone; for many people grieving over a lost mother, this is one tough holiday to get through. Experts suggest planning ahead of the dreaded day armed with coping strategies to help take on the emotional onslaught. And some people have come up with very creative ways to deal with it.

When Anthony Turk moved to Los Angeles in 1990, soon after losing his mother, a chance encounter gave him a focus to help him power through Mother's Day.

He got a job assisting the wardrobe stylist on a Wesson Oil commercial starring Florence Henderson, the actress who famously played the mom on "The Brady Bunch." Turk got friendly with Henderson on the set and confessed how much he missed his mother. At the end of the shoot, Henderson hugged him goodbye and gave him her address.



"She told me that if I was ever sad about my mother at Mother's Day, that I could still go to the store and buy a Mother's Day card," he says. "Florence said that I could mail it to her and it might feel like I was mailing it to my mother."

Every year since 1991 he has sent Henderson a Mother's Day card and he says it was just the therapy that he needed. Now, when other people are buzzing around talking about their plans for the second week in May, he has something he has to do, too.

"Most people my age always wished that they could have a mom like Carol Brady and in a way, I do," he says.

It's probably not a surprise that Amy Borkowsky, a New York comedian, often uses humor to deal with the loss of her mother four years ago to lung cancer. Borkowsky's mother played a large part in her act: for years she had saved her mother's hilariously over-protective answering messages (example: she cautioned her daughter not to take the trash out in her red bathrobe "because red is a gang color") and released them on CD.

"On my first motherless Mother's Day, I went to brunch with a friend who'd also just lost her mom," says Borkowsky. "We requested a table for four since 'our mothers will be joining us,' and, once seated, we pulled out framed pictures of our mothers and propped them up at the empty places."

Dr. Robin F. Goodman, director of the Billy Esposito Foundation Bereavement Center in New York, says that one of the more important elements of getting through the day is planning for it in whatever way you deem appropriate.

"There's the emotional strategies and the practical strategies to get through it," Goodman says. "For people who have lost their mothers, they are sometimes surprised that it is hard. Rather than be surprised, they should understand that it's normal that it might be difficult. It's not a sign of something bad — you're not crazy, you're not grieving badly. "

Kate Atwood founded Kate's Club in Atlanta to help children in the aftermath of losing a loved one. Atwood started the nonprofit in response to her own experiences feeling alone after losing her mother at age 12.



"It's ok to grieve. Mother's Day is a hard day for us who don't have moms, but there are also appropriate and uplifting ways for you to honor your mom after she's passed," she says. "I certainly try to do that each year. I'll do something girly, like treat myself to a spa day; something that I may have done with my mom had she been here. It's still a hard day for me to get through, but there are great ways to celebrate it and honor the person that you've lost.

What can friends or partners of people who are without a mom do to make it easier on this holiday?

"The most important thing to do is acknowledge it," Atwood says. "It is a great gift on that day when a friend or companion acknowledges that it may be a difficult day for you. Don't try to walk around it. You can send a card or an e-mail or even go so far as to say 'Do you want to do something fun today to honor your mom?' Really try to find that seed of hope or opportunity to celebrate that person who was important in your life."

Katherine Morgan, the woman who lost her mother 20 years ago, tries to reach that point today.

"I've figured out other ways to celebrate the day, such as honoring and remembering all the other mothers in my life with a card or an e-mail — aunts, friends, mother-in-law, all my 'surrogate mothers' — women who are older than I am that I've collected over the years," she says. "On most Mother's Days, I go to the cemetery and visit with my mom for awhile. And, my favorite way to pass the day is with my own-now grown-children if I can."