

This Mother's Day, sons and daughters of all ages reflect on lessons learned from their mum.

Mum's the word

Alex, 10, and Dominic Leal, 8, sons of Suzanne Leal, 40, lawyer and writer

Alex says: Mum teaches us to be honest and how to be a good person. She makes friends quite easily. She believes it's respectful not to talk about yourself all day. Mum asks about the other person, so they have a little talk about themselves. [Now] I'm pretty good at making friends.

Dominic says: Mum's taught me table manners and how to tie a shoelace. Thursday is a special day as we do fun things. She holds my hands and skips – I don't skip. My mother is a beautiful person. She's one of the best mothers in the world.

Karen Gribbin, writer and potter, 49, daughter of June Faint, 68, retired

When my parents separated, my mother became the sole breadwinner. She was the man about the house and would paper or paint the walls.

Mum spent most of my childhood working in factories to make ends meet. She taught me to be resilient by her own working example but also taught me the importance of not letting that resilience make you hard-hearted. It's been a lesson well learned.

What I remember most are Sundays, Mum's one day off. We'd spend the afternoon playing records: Elvis, the Beatles and Janis Joplin. We'd prance around singing into imaginary microphones in our private dance hall. Even now, we laugh remembering those jam sessions. We'll pause for a moment and

break into [the Paul Anka song, *(You're) Having My Baby*], "What a lovely way of sayin' how much I love you..."

Ana Pereira, 25, accounts manager, daughter of Anabela Marques, 50, jewellery designer

My mum taught me to be strong and not to take anything for granted. She was raised in Mozambique and went through the 1975 civil war there. Two years later, she left everything to start afresh in Portugal and in 1989 migrated to Australia with my father. It was an abusive relationship. When I was 17, she said, "Enough's enough" and with my sister, we moved out.

We lost everything. We moved into a rented house with only one mattress and two pillows but we laughed like we'd never done before. She became a totally new person. She'd always wanted to work in radio and in 2000, got her own Portuguese show on community radio called *Tranquillity*. She's a spiritual person. Even though all these things have happened to her, she always turns a negative into a positive.

Benython Oldfield, 34, literary agent, son of Nicole Oldfield, boarding school director

There's a line from the poem *If* by Rudyard Kipling that goes, "If you can ... walk with kings – nor lose the common touch". That captures my mum. She has respect and a deep humanity for all people.

I'm one of three boys and, as children, when we were being critical about someone less lucky than ourselves, she'd quote that line.

She'd never demand that we be anything. I feel lucky that I could always do what I liked. She always bought books for us, which gave me a love of reading and shaped what I do today.

Tenpa Dugdak, about 26, Tibetan community health worker, son of Karyong, who died aged 24

Like many Tibetans, I was educated in India and only saw my parents in Nepal once a year during school holidays. When I was about eight, I went home and my mum wasn't there. She was pregnant and had died from food poisoning. I heard from the neighbours. My dad didn't tell me, maybe because he didn't want me to get upset.

When I moved to Australia six years ago, I worked in a supermarket and I'd see all these mums pampering their kids. I started to miss her. In 2005, I went back to India on a mission to find out more. I heard from her friends that she was a very giving, compassionate lady. I'm not sure I have those characteristics but I look up to these values.

The closest connection I have to my mum is a poem my dad wrote about her and a turquoise necklace. I don't have a photo. Mother's Day is a sad day for me. It reminds me that I don't have a mother.



*Dominic, Alex, Xavier
and mum Suzanne*

**Bubula Lardi, 67, therapist, daughter
of Alicia McGragh, who died in 2006,
aged 90**

My mother was born in 1915 and had an incredible ability for economy – she had to with 10 children. I was taught to cook by the age of five. My first meal was roasted leg of mutton with roasted veg. She taught me how to refresh hand-me-down clothes. I can reinvent clothes forever. She was a natural green thumb. I could always talk to her about orchids. I had a pot-plant relationship with her.

I'd always wanted a mother who was lovely, cosy and margariney but mine wasn't a praising mother. I used to complain about her in that Irish-Catholic way. Now I don't. Not a day goes by when I don't feel grateful. It's wonderful that my mother carried me in her belly under the most difficult circumstances during the war.

Five years ago, when she was 85, she went into a nursing home with dementia. After a few months, I visited and was warned I might not recognise her. Suddenly I saw these eyes riveted on me with this fierce look. There was no personality in the recognition – her dementia was so far gone – but she saw right through. There was this essential connection with her eldest daughter. She grabbed my hand and stroked it. "You're a good girl," she said. I'd been waiting my whole life to hear that. →

**Jane Walker, 30, singer-songwriter,
daughter of Miranda Walker, 66, retired**

Mum always shared her love of nature with me. As a child we'd go bushwalking and she'd teach me not to pick flowers or take shells from the beach. It used to embarrass me when she picked up rubbish. Now I find myself doing it. She's always been scrupulously honest; if the bus driver gave her too much change, she'd give it back. She'd say it makes you feel better if you do the right thing. I find that to be true.

Mum has an inexhaustible well of love. I cringe to think I've been angry with her. Her acceptance of me, with all my flaws, has helped me to accept others. She has a great sense of humour and helped me not to take life too seriously. She likes to put on funny accents, so we often speak in cockney, calling each other "ducks" or "ducky".

As a kid, Mum would do the ironing next to me to make sure I practised the piano. If I didn't, she'd hit me on the thigh with a wooden spoon. Then one time the spoon broke and we both laughed so much. That was the last time she did it. Now I'm grateful she made me practise.

**Caralea Jones, 29, interior design and
architecture student, daughter of Helen
Moran, 49, co-chair of the National
Sorry Day Committee**

Mum has always been our rock. She's the matriarch of four girls and all of us are strong, independent women and I thank her for that.

She'd rollerskate with us to school. When I was 16, she started researching her history and found out she was stolen. Mum was one of six and lived in four foster homes before she was adopted. She didn't know she had Aboriginal heritage as her name had been changed.

That changed my life. I've gone through the Queensland selection process to become a foster parent so I can adopt children from indigenous communities. There are so many children out there. She's instilled in me the belief that family and culture are sacred.

**Immigration consultant Jacinta Tangey,
31, daughter of Patricia Cahill, who died
last year, aged 70**

Mum taught me to get busy living. She was an incredibly busy woman, whether it was at school or with family or the church. She was very involved in her community and made the most of every moment she had. At her funeral, the church was packed.

She knew the correct way to word things. I have my mother's voice in my head, saying, "When you write an invitation, there is a correct way to do it," or, "Make sure you send a thank-you note."

I think of Mum every day and miss her very much. She was kind and warm and loving. It's getting easier – as time goes on you remember all the good things.

*Jane and
mum Miranda*



Simon Moloney, 25, a sales co-ordinator, son of Veronica Moloney, a primary-school teacher

I admire Mum's multitasking. And the fact she always seems to give up what she has planned and puts her kids first. Anything James, Adele or I need done, or if someone needs to be picked up, Mum will always drop everything to do that. With our friends, we try to do what Mum has done with us – put them before ourselves.

Mum's encouraged me to have some savings behind me. She's just like Grandma in that way. Every time I see Grandma, she says, "How is your bank balance going?"

Mum is very involved with looking after Grandma at the moment; between her and her sister, Bernie, they've taken on the role of full-time carer. That's impressive. I try to give my mates a hand if they need something done – as Mum does with us.

Retiree Gary Conrad, 63, son of Doris Conrad, 97

She's just a lovely person and very alert. You go to see her and she's sitting there in some nice outfit, her make-up done and a bit of jewellery on.

My parents were both respectful sorts of people – reliable and traditional – coming through two world wars and the Depression. Their view was, whatever you earned and bought were your treasures. I've become a bit of a hoarder now.

I've picked up so many little things from Mum that I try to pass onto my own family now [Conrad and his wife have two adult daughters and two grandchildren]. Things like: don't live beyond your means, look after yourself and look after others.

Elena Ryan, 10, daughter of Marianne Ryan, 47, gaming attendant

Mum taught me ice skating when I was younger. She used to ice-skate when she was little. We get the genes from my great-grandmother, Nancy, who was an Australian ice-skating champion. Mum taught me, "Don't be afraid of the blades, don't be afraid of the ice – just do it."

Secondary-school teacher Caroline Duckett, 28, daughter of Janice Duckett, 62

When she was sick [with lung cancer], I learned how strong Mum is – she never complained about the chemotherapy, even though it was tough for her.

I learned, too, how generous Mum is – the number of people who made us hot dinners and sent flowers and cards was amazing. And so many of them told us what Mum had done for them when something had happened in their family, how she'd gone around and helped them out.

She's taught me how important family is, that they're the ones who are going to be there when you have tough times – and great times as well.

Charlie Bird, 8, son of university lecturer Liz Weir, 39

Sometimes I ride my bike with my mum. She's done a 100-kilometre ride on her bike. One day I'll probably do that. Mum's taught me to be nice. She tells me not to bully anyone. She says if someone is upset, stay away for a while and give them time to be themselves again.

Barbara Duncan, 62, daughter of Sheila Curley, 91

Mum and I get on very well together. She's quietly spoken and appreciative of anything you do for her. She's had a hard life. She married young and my father died when Mum was pregnant with her fifth child. She never remarried and struggled both financially and emotionally to raise us on her own.

There has been a lot of grief in her life. Out of all my siblings, just my younger brother and myself are still living. I really admire the way she's coped; I don't know if I could in that situation.

From her I learned how to manage a house and a family. She was always very fussy about the

house – and I've tried not to be as fussy. But the unconditional love that she gives is something I've tried to emulate. She doesn't see any flaws in her grandchildren at all.

She's a patient, caring sort of person and that's something that I like to think I've learned from her – to be patient.

Jason Wright, 14, son of Kirsty Wright, 40, a primary-school teacher

Mum and I are really close. She's always been there for me and she's always willing to hear me out.

I have learned a lot from the way she treats people. Say someone is crying in the playground, she'll go up to them and ask what's wrong. She makes sure they are all right, gives them a hug and looks after them.

From Mum I've learned how to enjoy life – with suitable boundaries, of course. I don't get embarrassed by anything she does because she's my mum and I love her. ●

Interviews by Bernadette Clohesy and Claire Scobie

*Charlie and
mum Liz*

