

Knees-up mothers for a day of peace

BERWYN LEWIS marvels at the strange ritual that is Mother's Day, and suggests appropriate gifts for some legendary mums

MOTHERS. Everyone has one but some have more than others. Some kids have up to three — a natural mother, a step-mother and a mother who lives with Dad. Then there are godmothers, grandmothers and mothers who pick up where post-permissive and remissive society failed.

What did its creator, Julia Ward Howe, have in mind in Boston in 1872 when she dreamed up Mother's Day? If it really were originally declared as a day of peace how did it become the biggest shopping expedition after Christmas?

Somewhere on the way to the shops Mother's Day became synonymous with the fastest pop-up toaster, the fluffiest slipper and the most transparent negligee. It stirs a gamut of emotions and feelings — guilt, love and lust, not to mention those inspired by Oedipus, who married his mother, something most men would still rather do. (Oedipal-complex psychiatrist Sigmund Freud would blame the mother's smother style rather than the son, for not growing up.)

All of which makes selecting an appropriate Mother's Day gift very tricky.

Would flower-power, product-of-the-1960s mothers appreciate having their memories jogged about why they accepted or rejected motherhood? What could be more embarrassing than an album or a tape of the Mothers of Invention? For pure nostalgia, how about the last pair of 3-D glasses in the universe? Or an Om-Sweet-Om embroidered sampler?

Some people have mothers who are easily dismissed for the year with an appropriately wrapped tea-towel, pot-holder or mini-cactus. Others have mothers whose virtues cannot be approximated with all the chrysanthemums in the world. Then there are mothers for whom nothing in this world, or the next, will be good enough. Drown them in perfume.

There are mothers who deny motherhood with claims of cabbage, stork and virgin births which these days translate into supermarket, courier, IVF (Impossible to Verify Fathers) and failed abortion theories. And there are some avenging mothers who boast of self-administered sperm cocktails. Gift hints for them would wither this page.

Even if they had blank cheques in their inner compartments, all the Italian handbags in the world could not compensate the carrier-of-the-world mother, the doormat, mopper, carer and permanent wielder of the Wettex.

Potato

Would you send flowers or a bone to history's weirdest mother? She must be the wolf who adopted Romulus and Remus, the twins born of a Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia, who was seduced by the god Mars and then executed for her pains (she was obviously to blame, probably wearing something provocative, "asking for it", at the time).

Her sons were popped into a basket and tossed into the nearest fast-flowing stream, Rome's Tiber River, into which generations of unwanted kittens, daughters

and puppies had been flung. This original basket case hit a snag when a female wolf stumbled on the hamper of infants and instead of snapping them up for lunch she nursed and adopted them.

One of the first successful surrogate-mother cases on record, this adventure in anthropomorphism led to later debates on custody and guardianship, not to mention wolfmen, big bad wolves, wolves in sheep clothing and crying wolf, as well as bad mother-in-law jokes.

Would you give a year's supply of dog food to Old Mother Hubbard who went to the cupboard to get her poor dog a bone?

Give mean step-mothers chocolates and sabotage their diets and complexions or something so challenging it's just this side of suicide, like a pair of racing roller-skates or a walking holiday to Yatabanjee Tank or the Antarctic.

Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage could do with a new outfit but would anything other than a worn-out sack dress benefit the revolution?

Mother Brown needs something for when her knees are up — a pants skirt, double-strength leopard spotted leotards or wicked lingerie.

The world's most painted mother, Whistler's, could do with a new interest in life. A gardening set might prod her out of that chair, or if that fails a video-recorder and tapes might turn her into the real couch potato she longs to be.

The most deserving mother is one's own — who else would have you? How she is rewarded is something best left to individual discretion.

But some mothers will be too busy on Mother's Day.

Their ideal Mother's Day present is as much distance as possible between themselves and their offspring, preferably in a sports car, a scarf around their neck and an open airline ticket to Paris or Bolivia in their pockets.

