Celebrating Mother’s Day after a loss can be hard. Two things that help: children and flowers.

I can still see the lilies-of-the-valley that surrounded my grandparents’ small patio. They would pop up around the stepping stones every year, announcing the arrival of spring. Many Mother’s Days were spent on that patio enjoying a family dinner; only rain would chase us inside.

Although it’s been years now since my grandmother passed away, those flowers will always bloom in my mind’s eye when Mother’s Day is on the horizon. The thought of them reminds me of how love, laughter and family defined the day.

Time changes things. Those who were a part of our younger years may no longer be with us—but the day still arrives, and each of us will remember. We will think of those special women in our lives who helped to shape us. They may not be our biological mothers, but instead a stepmother, a best friend’s mom, a beloved teacher or boss.

Some of us will simply reflect upon them quietly at home; others will take time to visit their mothers and grandmothers at a cemetery or other meaningful place.

It can be hard, sometimes, to know exactly how to commune with the mothers we miss.

When I speak with those who have lost a parent, they often state that others expect them to have “gotten over” their loss within a span of months and cannot understand why they are still grieving. My response is always the same: You have had your parent in your life since the beginning. They have always, or nearly always, been a part of your life, and months are not enough time to adjust to no longer having them in your world.

How can we best honor a mother’s memory? Those of us fortunate enough to have grown up with loving parents know that they wanted the best for us, and they did the best they could to be there for us. So here’s one answer: Now it’s our turn to do the same for our children, our nieces, nephews and those other kids who enter our lives.

Mother’s Day is a day dedicated to honoring our mothers and grandmothers—not just for who they are and who they were, but for who they made us. It’s a day to reflect upon childhood and to think of times spent with our own kids. It does not matter who we spend the day with, it matters who we have shared our lives with.

Give thanks for those women who loved us. Give thanks for those children whose lives we have positively impacted. Give thanks for those moments long ago.

Me? I will be spending some time on Mother’s Day planting lilies-of-the-valley at my new home, knowing that every year when they bloom, my grandmother will be with me still.

Flowers to Honor Mothers

For thousands of years, cultures around the world have attributed special meanings to different flowers. Flowers remain an important part of how we communicate today, whether we’re bringing Mom a bouquet on Mother’s Day, wooing a significant other with roses or choosing a flower arrangement for a loved one’s funeral.

Here’s a beginner’s guide to what’s symbolized by some of the most popular blossoms Americans use to honor their mothers’ memories.

• Azaleas: womanhood and rebirth.
• Camellias: longevity and gratitude.
• Carnations: a mother’s enduring love.
• Gladiolus: integrity and strength of character.
• Hydrangea: heartfelt sincerity.
• Lavender: devotion and virtue.
• Pink roses: appreciation.
• Sage: wisdom.

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2016 began with a double gut punch and ended with another. First, in January, two beloved cultural figures, the ethereal rock star David Bowie and the Harry Potter actor Alan Rickman, died in quick succession. It was a sobering start to the new year, as we realized that the oldest members of the “baby boom” generation were now heading toward their 70s. Then, as December wound down, we were stunned to hear of the untimely deaths of pop star George Michael and Star Wars icon Carrie Fisher. Now, as 2016 ends, we pause to remember some of those we bade farewell this year from various walks of life.

MUSIC: Bowie’s death was echoed months later by the loss of the equally inscrutable pop legend Prince. Those two inspirational beacons of rebel weirdness, though, were only the biggest headlines among many musical giants who left tremendous legacies this year. George Martin shaped the sound of rock & roll as the Beatles’ record producer. Maurice White melded countless musical genres into the 20-time-Grammy-nominated magic of Earth, Wind & Fire. Merle Haggard brought a powerful edge to popular country music. Marni Nixon sang the lead vocals for several of the most enduring film musicals of all time. George Michael pushed at the boundaries of sexual expression with soulful anthems to love and freedom. Glenn Frey, Leonard Cohen, Sharon Jones, Prince Buster, Guy Clark, Bobby Vee, Joey Feek—all of them left adoring fans around the nation and the world.

SPORTS: When Muhammad Ali died in June, he was mourned not only as the greatest boxer of all time, but as a political protestor who refused to serve in the Vietnam War and stood to face the consequences of his decision. Other athletes who passed away in 2016 included wrestler Chyna, whom the WWE honored as “the most dominant female competitor of all time”; Gordie Howe, the National Hockey League’s record-breaking 23-time All-Star player; Johan Cruyff, the superstar Dutch football player voted “European Player of the Century”; American wrestling star Harry “Mr. Fuji” Fujiwara; and Miami baseball pitcher José Fernández, a National League Rookie of the Year who died tragically at the age of 24.

SCIENCE: John Glenn, the heroic space pioneer who became the first American to orbit the earth before undertaking a political career as a U.S. senator, was one of two astronauts who died this year—the other being Edgar Mitchell, who walked on the Moon during the Apollo 14 mission and subsequently became an outspoken proponent of the existence of extraterrestrial life. We also said goodbye to a host of other scientific groundbreakers, including Marvin Minsky, cofounder of MIT’s artificial intelligence laboratory, and Yvonne Barr, the virologist who discovered the Epstein-Barr virus.

POLITICS: Two towering figures of American conservatism passed away early in the year: former First Lady Nancy Reagan, whose “Just Say No” anti-drug campaign helped shape popular attitudes about drug use for a generation, and Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, whose death in February left a court vacancy that became a huge point of debate in the presidential election. Janet Reno, the first woman to serve as U.S. Attorney General, died this fall, as did former Israeli President Shimon Peres, a Nobel Peace Prize winner. And several top political journalists filed their final reports, including PBS analyst and debate moderator Gwen Ifill, 60 Minutes reporter Morley Safer, and talk-show host John McLaughlin.

FILM & TV: Carrie Fisher, who inspired a generation of young women as Star Wars’s rebel leader Princess Leia, and Alan Rickman, who captivated millennials as Harry Potter’s Severus Snape, may have been the most famous current screen stars who died in 2016. But for many older Americans, a more emotional farewell came with the passing of Patty Duke, whose career blossomed from teen stardom in the 1960s to encompass ten Emmy Awards and a stint as president of the Screen Actors Guild. Two offscreen titans left huge Hollywood legacies: All My Children creator Agnes Nixon, who shaped the entire field of TV soap operas, and producer/director Garry Marshall, who created sitcoms like Happy Days before making iconic films like Pretty Woman. Other veteran stars we lost included Lois Lane actress Noel Neill, comedian Garry Shandling, R2-D2 performer Kenny Baker, Everybody Loves Raymond costar Doris Roberts, Godfather actor Abe Vigoda, Star Trek’s Anton Yelchin, The Brady Bunch’s Florence Henderson, socialite Zsa Zsa Gabor, and TV actor/composer Alan Thicke.

BOOKS: Harper Lee, author of the classic American novel To Kill a Mockingbird, passed away in February just months after the controversial publication of her older manuscript, Go Set a Watchman. The literary world said farewell to other giants, too: Umberto Eco, author of The Name of the Rose; Edward Albee, the Pulitzer-winning playwright behind Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?; and Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning author of Night.

Find more coverage of the year’s life stories at: www.legacy.com/2016