

“The Mother of All Mothers”

I told my mom it was pretty cold outside today.

“Dress warmly. Do you have a hat?”

“Mom, I’m 65 years old.”

“What does that have to do with anything? You still need to dress warmly.”

“Yes, but you don’t have to tell me that. At my age, I’m fully capable of handling that myself.”

“Oh. All right. I didn’t realize.”

Really? REALLY?

Okay, calm down, Cathy. Don’t get hooked in.

My mom turned 99 this year. You read that right. 99 years old. She lives in NY, where she’s always lived, and where I was raised. I live in Southern California, where I’ve lived for more than 35 years.

This year, a year of so many overwhelmingly dramatic changes, I’ve come to realize something: When it comes to my mom, some things never change.

“What time is it there?”

Every time I’m on the phone with my mom, not 60 seconds into our conversation comes, The Question: “What time is it there?”

Me: It’s a three-hour time difference, mom. It’s three hours earlier here than it is in New York.

Mom: So, let’s see...that means that...well... I don’t even know what time it is in New York. What time is it in New York?

Me: It’s 2:00 here, so that means that it’s 5:00 in New York.

Mom: Okay, so it’s *later* in New York. I thought you said that it’s *earlier*.

Me: No, no, it’s earlier *here*. It’s later *there*.

Mom: So, when I'm having breakfast, you're having lunch.

Me: No mom, it's the opposite. When *I'm* having breakfast, *you're* having lunch.

Mom: Well, I eat a very late breakfast. I eat my breakfast for lunch because I like to sleep late.

Me: Nothing wrong with that. What'd you have for breakfast today?

Mom: I had pancakes. They were very good. There were scrambled eggs, too, but I only like to eat them with ketchup, and there was no ketchup, so I left them.

Me: I'm actually about to eat lunch.

Mom: It's so late.

Me: Yeah, a little. It's 2:00.

Mom: Oh, I thought it was 5:00.

Me: No, no. It's 5:00 in New York. It's 2:00 here.

Mom: It's 5:05 here.

Me: Well, yes. Time marches on.

Mom: Time does what?

Me: It marches on.

Mom: Spell it.

Me: M-A-R-C-H-E-S

Mom: M-A-R-...

Me: C-H-E-S. M-A-R-C-H-E-S.

Mom: M-A-R-C-H-E-S. Marches. Marches! Time marches on!

Me: Yes!

Mom: It's 5:07.

Me: Still marching.

Mom: So, that means that it's 2:07 in Santa Monica.

Me: Yes! Yes, that's right.

And then we get disconnected.

I call back, but her line is busy. Again. Busy. Again. Busy. So, I wait.

I finally reach her again.

Mom: What happened? I was talking to you, and I wasn't getting any response, which is not like you. So, I said, "Cathy? Cathy?" And there's no answer. And I thought, "Did she hang up? Why would she hang up? *Did* you hang up?"

Me: No, mom, I didn't hang up. We just got disconnected, is all.

Mom: But what happened?

Me: I don't know! Sometimes it just happens!

Mom: Oh. Okay. What time is it there?

End scene.

"Just do your very best."

One afternoon, I was on the phone with my mom, and she asked me how I was.

"Well, to be honest, mom, I'm feeling a little depressed."

"Oh, I don't like to hear that at all. That doesn't make me feel good. You have to take better care of yourself."

"I *am* taking care of myself."

"I mean, are you doing everything that you can to feel better?"

"Yes, Mom, I'm doing everything that I can to feel better."

"Are you doing your best?"

"Yes, Mom. I'm doing my best."

"Well, just do your very best. And then do some more."

“What? What??? How can I do my best and *then* do some more? My best is...my *best!* There’s nothing better than best! That’s how it goes! Good, better, best! That’s the hierarchy!

“Is there some new kind of level that I haven’t heard of, Mom? I mean, maybe it goes good, better, best, BESTESTER!!! BOING!!! (Explosion!!!)”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Cathy. I just want you to do your very best, that’s all.”

“Mom, I’m a grown woman. Why are we even having this conversation?”

(BEAT)

“I just want you to do your best.”

“Oh Christ.”

End scene.

“Would you like some grapes?”

I don’t know what it is about fruit, but my mother cannot stop offering it to people. As soon as someone crosses her threshold, all of a sudden, she becomes the produce manager at Stop ‘n’ Shop. On my last trip to NY, here’s how it went:

“Hi mom.”

“Hi honey. It’s so good to see you. What can I offer you?”

“Nothing, mom. I’m not hungry.”

“Would you like a banana?”

“No thanks, mom. I’m not hungry.”

“How about an orange?”

“No thanks, mom.”

“How about some grapes?”

“Mom, I said I wasn’t hungry.”

“Oh, you don’t have to be hungry to eat grapes.”

“Well, I do. I don’t eat to pass the time.”

“You’re being very fresh.”

“I can’t be fresh, mom. I’m 65. There’s nothing fresh about me.”

“Okay. Then how about an apple?”

End scene.

Of course, I vowed I would *never* do anything that annoying to *my* kids. *Ever!*

Well, here we are. I have a 17-year-old daughter who finds me endlessly irritating, if I’m reading her eye-rolling correctly. How the hell did that happen? Hadn’t I promised to avoid that? Wasn’t I going to be a cool mom?

I don’t ask my daughter, “What time is it there?” But I do consistently ask her what class she has for 1st period on Tuesday.

“Mom. English. I’ve told you like a million times.”

“I can’t keep it in my head.”

“You can’t keep anything in your head.”

“That’s a nice thing to say.”

“Well, it’s true.”

“Can’t you cut me a little slack?”

“Can’t you be less annoying?”

End scene.

That’s the thing: Moms are inherently annoying. There’s no way to avoid it. Even if you think you’ll find a way to get around it, you won’t. It comes with the job. Don’t fight it. It’s better just to accept it.

Also, sometimes it’s easier to just eat the fruit.