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INFORMAÇÕES PARA A IMPRENSA

Best wishes on DIN A6

For Mother’s Day, you can send flowers by courier or write a few words on WhatsApp. But a personal greeting is a much more thoughtful gesture – for example a hand-written card. In a small format that is (once again) making a big impact.

Just about 148 x 105 mm – those are the standard dimensions of a postcard. However, it can convey a vast array of emotions. The image on the back; the individually penned message on the front; the fact that it was purchased, written, stamped and posted – all of these details make the small card an anomaly amidst the noise of today’s communication. When you discover a personally written postcard in your letterbox, you feel as though you have received a gift: Someone was thinking of me, made an effort for me... This subjective feeling has also been academically confirmed. Sending a postcard expresses special appreciation for the recipient, explains linguist Professor Hajo Diekmannshenke from the University of Koblenz (Germany), whose work focuses on studying this phenomenon. And the beautiful part is: This appreciation remains and it is visible and palpable. Mum will hardly hang a WhatsApp message on her refrigerator; however, she will gladly display a card with well wishes.

It is for this reason, too, that a greeting card is considered to be one of the most important thoughtful gestures on Mother's Day along with flowers and chocolates. Around the second Sunday in May, when Brazil, the US and many European countries traditionally celebrate mothers and motherhood, the manufacturers of greeting cards see a rise in revenues. The curve continues to rise during holiday season – becoming ever steeper: For example, German manufacturers report annual increases of 5% and Deutsche Post reports that more than 210 million pieces of mail are carried per year – an analogue success story in the age of Facebook, Snapchat and the like.

The news in brief delivered by the postman

When the “correspondence card” was officially introduced in Vienna on 1 October 1869 by the Austro-Hungarian “Directorate General for Postal and Telegraph Affairs”, its purpose was not to send holiday greetings or celebratory wishes but purely to transmit information: The postcard was a small and cheap alternative to sending a letter and was also suitable for anyone who lacked the confidence to pen the long, elaborate sentences that were typical for written communication at that time. Because the post was delivered several times a day in many places, news did indeed reach recipients very quickly – in a way, making the postcard the SMS of centuries past.

With the founding of the Universal Postal Union in 1874, it first became possible to send mail across a country and later around the world. The postcard was popular in Scandinavian countries and the UK, and Russia, Ceylon, the US, Japan, Spain and Italy soon followed. In 1888, postcards existed in more than 35 countries around the world. In addition to messages that consisted purely of text, people quickly discovered the allure of visual information – thanks to new photo technology and printing methods, ever more creative picture cards and picture postcards appeared on the market. It's no wonder that, until the 1920s, postcards were treasured collectibles that were saved in special albums or collection boxes.

Nowadays, fans celebrate their love of postcards more openly: Members of "Postcrossing" display their most beautiful and unusual pieces in the online gallery of this international postcard community. Some 690,000 people from 212 countries participate in the project, in which cards are sent and/or received randomly; more than 43 million cards have been sent to date. Incidentally, the country with the most members is Russia; however, the Germans are the most diligent senders. Incidentally, the country with the most members is Russia; however, the Germans are the most diligent senders.

Tips from a postcard writer

According to Sabine Rieker, it's quality over quantity. The 31-year-old Stuttgart resident has turned her hobby into a job and works as a full-time "postcard writer": Her beautiful, ornate handwriting and a great deal of poetic fancy adorn cards that subsequently wind up in the letterboxes of her customers' addressees. Whether a sailing school is thanking its participants, a daughter is sending a greeting to her mother from abroad or a gallery owner is looking for original performance material: Sabine Rieker finds the right words and the perfect style. All she needs is a card and a pen, nothing more. "I always start with the address field. I purposely design it with various fonts and fill up a lot of space. In the process, I already have so much contact with the paper and am in such vigorous motion that I am able to form a connection to the individual in question. The salutation in a beautiful cursive takes care of the rest – this is when I decide what I want to say and how I want to say it."

What advice does she have for less creative card writers who may know that they want to spare mum the clichés but don't know how? "Most of all, don't doubt your own creativity. The proof is in the fact that you decided to write something in the first place." If you allow your thoughts to drift to the recipient, inspiration will surely strike – beginning with the big question of what your mother means to you personally, and including practical things such as her favourite colour and the handwriting that fits her best. The image on the card can be helpful as well, as photos or illustrations may provide ideas with regard to content. Is there a slogan or a saying on the front? Then maybe you can personalise that message on the back. This way you can create artful motivational phrases à la Rieker, such as: "You are my everyday hero" or "Thank you for being you" – which of course not only make for a great card on Mother's Day, but all year round.

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For a really special gift this Mother's Day, there's nothing like a hand-written personal message.

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