

“The Many Ways of Being A Mother”
ANNIE’S MAILBOX

DEAR ANNIE: I remember reading a piece a long time ago that said something about women who didn’t win “mother of the year.” I’d love to see it again. Can you please find it and reprint it?

-Seattle Reader

DEAR SEATTLE: Here it is. The piece was written by Cindy Lange-Kubick and appeared in the Lincoln (Neb.) Journal Star. Happy Mother’s Day.

This is for all the mothers who didn’t win Mother of the Year. All the runners-up and all the wannabes. The mothers too tired to enter or too busy to bother.

This is for all the mothers who froze their buns on metal bleachers at soccer games Friday night instead of watching from cars, so that when their kids asked, “Did you see my goal?” they could say, “Of course, wouldn’t have missed it for the world,” and mean it.

This is for all the mothers who have sat up all night with sick toddlers in their arms, wiping up barf laced with Oscar Mayer wieners and cherry Kool-Aid, saying, “It’s OK, honey, Mommy’s here.”

This is for the mothers who gave birth to babies they’ll never see. And the mothers who took those babies and made them homes. For all the mothers who run carpools and make cookies and sew Halloween costumes. And all the mothers who don’t.

What makes a good mother anyway? Is it patience? Compassion? Broad hips? The ability to nurse a baby, fry a chicken and sew a button all at the same time? Or is it heart? Is it the ache you feel when you watch your son disappear down the street, walking to school alone for the very first time? The jolt that takes you from sleep to dread, from bed to crib at 2 a.m. to put your hand on the back of a sleeping baby? The need to flee from wherever you are and hug your child when you hear news of a school shooting, a fire, a car accident, a baby dying? I think so.

So this is for all the mothers who sat down with their children and explained about making babies. And for all the mothers who wanted to but just couldn’t. This for reading “Goodnight Moon” twice a night for a year. And then reading it again, “Just one more time.”

This is for all the mothers who mess up. Who yell at their kids in the grocery store and swat them in despair and stomp their feet like a tired 2-year-old who wants ice cream before dinner.

This is for all the mothers who taught their daughters to tie their shoes before they started preschool. And for all the mothers who chose Velcro instead. For all the mothers who bite their lips when their 14-year-olds dye their hair green. Who lock themselves in the bathroom when babies keep crying and won’t stop.

This is for mothers who show up at work with spit-up in their hair and milk stains on their blouses and diapers in their purses.

This is for all the mothers who teach their sons to cook and their daughters to sink a jump shot.

This is for all the mothers whose heads turn automatically when a little voice calls “Mom?” in a crowd, even though they know their own offspring are at home.

This is for mothers who put pinwheels and teddy bears on their children's graves. This is for mothers whose children have gone astray, who can't find the words to reach them.

This is for young mothers stumbling through diaper changes and sleep deprivation. And mature mothers learning to let go. For working mothers and stay-at-home mothers. Single mothers and married mothers. Mothers with money, mothers without.

This is for you all. So hang in there. And better luck next year, I'll be rooting for you.