

For All the Mothers of the Year

All the runners-up and all the wanna-bes. The mothers too tired to enter or too busy to care. This is for all the mothers who froze their buns off 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 all the mothers of war who fled in the night and can't find their children. 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 of the victims of the Colorado shooting, and the mothers of the murderers. For the mothers of the survivors, and the mothers who sat in front of their TVs in horror, hugging their child who just came home from school, safely. 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, cook dinner, and sew a button on a shirt, all at the same time? Or is it heart? Is it the ache you feel when you watch your son or daughter 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 all about making babies. And for all the mothers who wanted to but just couldn't. This is 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 shoelaces before they started school. And for all the mothers who opted for Velcro instead. For all the mothers who bite their lips-sometimes until they bleed-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 all the mothers who show up at work with spit-up in their hair and milk stains on their blouses and diapers in their purse. This is for all the mothers who teach their sons to cook and their daughters to sink a jump shot. This is for all 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 all the mothers who sent their sons to school with stomach aches, assuring them they'd be just FINE once they got there, only to get calls from the school nurse and hour later asking them to please pick them up. Right away. 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.