

PRAYERS & WISHES FOR ALL THE CHILDREN

We pray for the children who sneak Popsicles before supper, who erase holes in math workbooks, who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire, who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers, who are born in places where we wouldn't be caught dead, who never go to the circus, who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children who bring us who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money.

And we pray for those who never get dessert, who have no safe blanket to drag behind them, who watch their parents watch them die, who can't find any bread to steal, who don't have any rooms to clean up, whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser, whose monsters are real.

We pray for children who spend all their allowance before Tuesday, who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food, who like ghost stories, who shove dirty clothes under the bed, who never rinse out the tub, who get visits from the tooth fairy, who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool, who squirm in church and scream in the phone, whose tears we sometimes laugh at and whose smiles can make us cry.

And we pray for those whose nightmares come in the daytime, who will eat anything, who have never seen a dentist, who aren't spoiled by anybody, who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep, who live and move, but have no being.

We pray for children who want to be carried and for those who must, who we never give up on and for those who don't get a second chance. For those we smother and . . .

for those who will grab the hand of anybody kind enough to offer it.

We tried so hard to make things better for our kids that we made them worse. For my grandchildren, I'd like better. I'd really like for them to know about hand me down clothes and homemade ice cream and leftover meat loaf sandwiches. I really would.

I hope you learn humility by being humiliated, and that you learn honesty by being cheated. I hope you learn to make your own bed and mow the lawn and wash the car. And I really hope nobody gives you a brand new car when you are sixteen. It will be good if at least one time you can see puppies born and your old dog put to sleep. I hope you get a black eye fighting for something you believe in, I hope you have to share a bedroom with your younger brother.

And it's all right if you have to draw a line down the middle of the room, but when he wants to crawl under the covers with you because he's scared, I hope you let him.

When you want to see a movie and your little brother wants to tag along, I hope you'll let him. I hope you have to walk uphill to school with your friends and that you live in a town where you can do it safely.

On rainy days when you have to catch a ride, I hope you don't ask your driver to drop you two blocks away so you won't be seen riding with someone as uncool as your Mom.

If you want a slingshot, I hope your Dad teaches you how to make one instead of buying one. I hope you learn to dig in the dirt and read books.

When you learn to use computers, I hope you also learn to add and subtract in your head. I hope you get teased by your friends when you have your first crush on a girl, and when you talk back to your mother that you learn what ivory soap tastes like.

May you skin your knee climbing a mountain, burn your hand on a stove and stick your tongue on a frozen flagpole. I don't care if you try a beer once, but I hope you don't like it.

And if a friend offers you dope or a joint, I hope you realize he is not your friend.

I sure hope you make time to sit on a porch with your Grandpa and go fishing with your Uncle. May you feel sorrow at a funeral and joy during the holidays. I hope your mother punishes you when you throw a baseball through your neighbor's window and that she hugs you and kisses you at Christmas time when you give her a plaster mold of your hand. These things I wish for you-tough times and disappointment, hard work and happiness. To me, it's the only way to appreciate life.