

May 7, 2012

To My Children –

Mother's Day is a day that children give thanks to their Mom, but without my children, there would be no Mother's Day. So, I choose instead to give thanks to my children on my special day because it is really their special day.

When I think about being a Mom, I remember the day both of my children were born. These days made me a mother but they are also my children's birthdays. The day they were born! Those two days are fully worth celebrating. Katie was born in California and my parents were with me, even though my father was very sick. Jordan was still in Okinawa. I went into labor in the middle of the night and my Mom and Dad drove me to the hospital. It was a long wait; almost 17 hours. Katie was three weeks early and not really ready to be born. She needed more "information" and had to be coaxed to birth. I was finally given an epidural out of sheer exhaustion. Not everything went well and I was alone and afraid. Later in the bed next to me was a veteran mother who was immediately ready for guests, blow drying her hair, putting on makeup, breast feeling. I hated her. She had the inside bed, so all her family walked by my bed. I hated them too. Loud shrill voices, all the excitement. There I was with an IV and blood transfusions, not even able to take care of my baby. So my sweet Katie was born the hard way, not quite ready, without the joy and excitement of uncomplicated birth. Of course, that joy came later as we discovered the adventure of loving each other. That journey began the first time she looked at me and smiled. Nobody else in the universe mattered. I smiled back at her and she laughed. What were we celebrating – life, connection, love?

Two years, and one month later my baby boy was born. This was a very different experience. I was settled, not moving, not mourning, with my husband at home. Nikolas was just a day or two early. I again went into labor early in the morning, and a friend came to stay with Katie overnight. No longer in an urban area, Nikolas was born in a small hospital in Yuma, Arizona, on the Mexican border. The doctor's were all on call, and I worried that I might have repeat problems at child birth. Instead we arrived at the hospital and my sweet boy was born in about 45 minutes. The male nurse from Canada didn't believe my complaints, he didn't call the doctor, and my husband was just glad there were current Sports Illustrated magazines. Soon we were on a wild ride, with the doctor flying in the back door, and my hope of pain relief a foregone hope. Upon birth my son looked like he had just ridden the biggest, most violent wave ever. He was "beaten up" and slept for hours. We came home and I was up and shopping at the grocery store within 24 hours. He slept most of those early hours. Of course, when he did wake up, he woke up with a vengeance. I think he was angry about his birth for years.

It is a good thing early experience is not remembered by children. Until children are able to encode events and feelings through language, a natural amnesia exists until about age five. Despite this, some children still remember experience at the level of sensation and feeling, without meaning or sequence. This is certainly true of children who are traumatized at a young age. I can't imagine what it would be like if we each remembered the trauma of birth. I have no doubt that birth is a trauma for babies. Perhaps some children carry that forward. I don't know, but it wouldn't surprise me.

When my children were age four and two their father died. This was a great hardship for us for many years. I don't think they remember much of this, although they certainly sensed my anxiety and depression. Over time, though, my basic sense of joy returned and how I did love my kids.

We didn't have an easy time. My son struggled to find himself. For me though, all the hard memories are nothing compared to the fun times. And as my children have grown up, I am so incredibly proud of both of them. They are really wonderful people, each different, but in some ways the same. I wonder sometimes, how it is possible that I raised such incredible people. I so enjoy them and appreciate all they do for me. They have learned to give back. They are good and loyal to their friends. They are learning to honor commitments. I don't know how you teach that . I'm not sure you can teach that. But when it happens, there is only one reasonable response... to give amazing thanks. Motherhood is one of God's biggest gifts, always to be met joyfully, miraculously, with absolute humility. When we leave the center of the universe, we become the person God wants us to be . For this, I give thanks to my children this Mother's Day and all those that come. I am who I am because of the miracle of their birth.