

May 31, 2005 Tuesday

LENGTH: 641 words

HEADLINE: Thank you, teachers, for your patience with children -- and parents

BYLINE: Anne Michaud

BODY:

Dear Teacher,

It's getting to be that time of year when I contemplate buying little gifts to say thank you for all you've done for my children since September. Of course, a packet of note cards or tickets to the cinema could never really express my gratitude. So, I have thought of writing you a letter.

I wanted to say thanks for that conversation last fall when you took the time to listen as I explained my daughter's habit of turning everything into a joke. Her habit was really masking her fear of failure.

But then I had to respond to a summons for jury duty, renew my vehicle registration, interview baby sitters, send birthday party invitations, balance the checking account, compete with my co-worker for a promotion and make several telephone calls to have my health insurance company approve a prescription.

I wanted to thank you for always answering the notes I sent to school with questions about my daughter's progress. You took so much delight when she shined.

But then I had to clear the dishes from the kitchen counter, write a check for learning software that some company sent home with my child, buy a kid's party gift, fill out paperwork to be reimbursed for child care expenses, fold the laundry, schedule a visit to the grandparents' house, send a plain white T-shirt to school and sort my free coupons for the carnival, movie rental and a shopping spree at the bookstore.

I wanted to tell you that I recognized, during a class trip, your enormous patience. And I was touched by the way my daughter put her arms around your waist, in affection and trust. You stayed fresh enough after a long day to teach the kids to play "war" and "go fish" on the train ride home.

But then I had to argue with the health insurance company over my husband's visit to the emergency room, find a cure for my stress-related neck spasm, choose a cell phone carrier, conduct a whole-house search for a missing library book, pack the winter clothes in boxes destined for the attic, and then unpack them again and leave them lying around the bedroom because this spring weather just would not turn warm.

I wanted to express my gratitude for the tough dinosaur project you assigned, which we struggled with at the time but which we will remember forever because we did it together.

But then I had to write e-mail to friends, plan a trip to our old neighborhood, field appointment changes by my dentist (Tuesday looked like a good golf day, I guess), review three books authors have sent me, put together outfits for the gymnastics recital, work out three times a week, get

eight hours of sleep a night and drink 64 ounces of water every day.

I wanted to thank you for reinforcing lessons about safety, even as we received our fifth notice this school year saying another sex offender had moved into the neighborhood.

But then I had to pack lunches, pick up sunscreen for the field day, buy new pants because my daughters' ankles were showing in every pair, sew on a button, plan something special for our 10th wedding anniversary so we wouldn't feel like complete losers by letting it slip by, plan the summer vacation and ask for a day off from work because I just realized on a Wednesday that there would be no school on Friday.

I meant to tell you that I know we missed parents' reading day at the school. We forgot about a recital, too, and one time I brought my daughters to the front door, only to realize there was no school that day. Maybe I looked a little crazy to you -- or worse, uncaring.

I care. I notice the good things you have imparted this year, and the love you have put into your assignments and your lessons. My daughters will take a part of you with them. I want you to know I was watching and noticing, just in case you got the idea that I was too busy with the little things in life to take a deep breath and say thank you.