

A LETTER TO MY SON, NICHOLAS

After the words of my mother

Nicholas J. Pirro

In April of 1979,
I became sick every morning.

I was twenty years old
when a doctor told me
there was a tumor inside me.

Something dangerous.

Something that needed
to be removed.

Immediately.

He made the appointment
for the following week,
and I went home frightened,

twenty years old
and scared to death
of something growing inside me
that I did not yet understand.

I talked to Grandma.

She insisted
I get a second opinion.

Thank God
for mothers
who insist.

I went to her doctor.

He examined me,
took some blood,
left the room,

and when he returned
he was smiling.

"Congratulations," he said.

"You're having a baby."

And there I sat,

mouth open,

unable to understand
how one doctor could call you
a tumor

and another

could call you
a child.

He asked me
why I wasn't happy.

I told him
what the other doctor had said.

Even he couldn't believe it.

But he reassured me.

There was no tumor.

There was you.

And suddenly
I couldn't get dressed
fast enough.

I couldn't wait
to tell your father.

We called everyone.

We told them our news.

We celebrated.

Because what I had spent days
believing might take my life

was actually a life
being given to me.

You.

-

A month later
I went back.

The doctor listened
to your heart,
then listened again.

He came into the room
all aglow
and told me
there were two of you.

Twins.

And once again
I was afraid.

Your sister was only two.

I didn't know
if I was capable
of caring for two more children.

So I called Grandma.

Of course I called Grandma.

And she told me
if I could care for one,
I could certainly
care for two.

For months
I prepared myself
to meet both of you.

Until my seventh month,
when the doctor discovered
there had never been
another baby.

The second heartbeat
was an echo.

Your heartbeat
traveling through the umbilical cord,

returning to us
as something
we mistook for another life.

There was only you.

So I prayed for a boy.

And I worked
on your blue knitted blanket,
stitch after stitch,
waiting for you.

On December 18, 1979,
my wish was granted.

You came into the world.

And it was
a very happy day.

-

I wish I could tell you
that being your mother
meant I always knew
what I was doing.

I didn't.

I learned.

Responsibility.

Patience.

Understanding.

Communication.

These were the things
I tried to give you,

even while
I was still learning them myself.

Life has its ups and downs,

but life
is what you make it.

Think things through.

Look at the good.

Look at the bad.

Make your decision,
then understand
that decisions have consequences.

And Nicholas,
you will make mistakes.

Please make them.

Don't spend your life
afraid of making
the wrong decision.

Mistakes teach you.

Sometimes better
than success ever could.

You will remember them.

You will grow from them.

Life is an experience
from which
you will always learn.

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Talk to your children.

But more importantly,
listen to them.

Start when they are young.

Keep listening
when they grow older.

Because the older they become,
the more important
those conversations will be.

Understanding doesn't appear
simply because
two people love each other.

Sometimes understanding
has to be spoken.

Sometimes it has to listen.

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Educate yourself.

Educate your children.

Give them every opportunity
you can.

But don't do what I did.

Don't burden yourself
for twenty years
wondering what you are supposed
to be when you grow up.

Choose carefully.

Ask yourself
what makes you happy.

And if someday
the answer changes,
change your mind.

That is one
of the greatest parts of life.

You can make
your own footprints.

They don't have to follow mine.

They don't have to follow
anyone's.

-

There are things
I wish I had done better.

I ran from my problems sometimes
instead of facing them.

I needed time to think.

You knew that.

Sometimes
I would take the dog,
go to Dunkin Donuts,
get a coffee,
turn the radio up,
and drive.

No destination.

Just road.

Music.

Coffee.

A dog beside me.

And enough miles
between me and whatever hurt
for my thoughts
to finally become quiet.

Believe it or not,
it helped me think rationally.

And you gave me that time.

You didn't ask
too many questions.

Thank you for that.

Maybe children don't realize
how often
they take care of their parents too.

-

There are things about you
I have always loved.

Your sense of humor.

Your sensitivity.

The way you care.

The way you love.

Your generosity.

Even when I dropped you off
at school,

you never hesitated
to kiss me goodbye

and tell me
to have a good day,

even when your classmates
thought it was
a bunch of mush.

You didn't care.

You kissed your mother.

I hope you know
how much that meant to me.

You looked at both sides
of things.

You stood up
for what you believed.

And I knew,

even then,

that you would give
the shirt off your back
to someone who needed it.

You made me proud.

You make me proud.

-

Looking back,

I realize
I wasn't only your parent.

I was your teacher.

Though sometimes
you were mine.

I taught you responsibility
when you were young.

Your favorite chore
was sweeping the floor.

And when one of those
creepy insects appeared,

I was terrified.

But there you were.

My little boy,
standing proud,
protecting his mother
from a bug.

You probably thought
you were doing
something small.

Mothers remember
the small things.

-

I hope you go to college.

I hope you find a career
that makes you happy.

And if you don't know
what makes you happy,

look backward.

Look at the child
you used to be.

Sometimes what we love
is waiting there,

before the world tells us
what we're supposed
to become.

Around thirty,

I hope you marry
the girl of your dreams.

I hope you have children.

And when you do,

have rules.

Stick to them.

But remember
that life doesn't always fit
neatly inside rules.

Be flexible
when circumstances require it.

Be consistent.

Be fair.

Be present.

-

And Nicholas,
take pictures.

Please.

Take too many.

Keep scrapbooks.

Save the ridiculous ones.

Save the blurry ones.

Save the ordinary Tuesday
nobody thinks matters.

Because life passes
too quickly.

It becomes hectic.

Years begin moving faster
than you thought years could move,

and one day
you will try to remember
something that once seemed
impossible to forget.

Pictures help.

So keep them.

-

Learn from other people's mistakes.

Life is too short
to make all of them yourself.

Be confident.

Walk away
from foolish people.

Enjoy your life.

Be spontaneous.

Remember those afternoons
when you came home from school
and discovered
I had already packed the car?

Another weekend trip.

You and your sister
thought I was crazy.

Maybe I was.

But before long,
you started looking forward
to those little vacations.

And remember
when we would just get into the car
and drive?

No reservations.

No itinerary.

No destination.

Just miles.

And miles.

And miles.

Just to see
where we might end up.

Jen hated
when we got lost.

But you and I?

We called it
an adventure.

Maybe that is something
I hope you carry with you.

Not every wrong turn
means you're lost.

Sometimes
you simply haven't discovered
where you're going yet.

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There will come a day
when you cannot call me
to ask what I think.

There will come a day
when you have to make
the decision yourself.

I hope, somehow,
something I taught you
will still answer.

Maybe you'll hear me
telling you to think it through.

Maybe you'll remember
that mistakes are lessons.

Maybe you'll walk away
from foolish people.

Maybe you'll take a picture.

Maybe you'll kiss your children goodbye
even when someone thinks
it's a bunch of mush.

Maybe you'll pack the car
without telling anyone
where you're going.

Maybe you'll get lost.

I hope sometimes
you do.

And when everyone else
starts worrying,

maybe you'll smile

because you'll remember
your mother

with a coffee in her hand,

the dog beside her,

the radio blasting,

driving nowhere
until nowhere
became somewhere.

And you'll remember

that we thought of it
as an adventure.

-

I don't know
what the rest of your life
will look like.

A mother never gets
to know that
when she writes a letter
to her son.

She can only imagine.

She can hope.

She can worry.

She can offer advice
that he may not understand
until years later.

And she can leave him
with the one thing
she knows for certain.

So whatever happens,
whatever roads you take,
whatever mistakes you make,

whatever career you choose
or leave behind,

whoever you become,

however far you travel
from that little boy
who swept my floors,

caught my creepy insects,

kissed me goodbye at school,

and climbed into the car
without knowing
where his crazy mother
was taking him,

always remember

and never forget:

I love you, son.

And I couldn't have asked
for a better child.

All my love,

Mom.

Mommy.

Madre.

And if someday
those three names
exist only in your memory,

say them once in a while.

Not because
I need to hear them.

But because once,

a twenty-year-old girl
was told there was something
dangerous growing inside her.

And she was terrified.

Until another doctor smiled
and told her

it wasn't a tumor.

It was a baby.

It was a boy.

It was you.

And Nicholas,

you were never
something that happened to my life.

You were one of the things
that made it worth living.

About the Writer

Lorraine Ann Pirro was a master's-level scholar in Special Education, a devoted educator, and a mother whose belief in the transformative power of education shaped both her professional life and her family. Throughout her career, she was driven by a desire to bring out the best in every student, embracing innovative and sometimes unorthodox teaching methods, including her work with the Wilson approach, to reach students in ways traditional instruction could not.

Her commitment to education extended beyond academics. She believed in patience, understanding, communication, responsibility, and giving young people the confidence to find their own way in life. Those same values are reflected in the words she left behind for her children and in the lessons she sought to pass from one generation to the next.

Lorraine's legacy continues through the Lorraine Ann Pirro Public School Endowment Memorial Fund (LAPPSE), established in her memory to recognize educators who demonstrate the same passion for teaching and dedication to helping students reach their full potential that defined her own work.

She is survived by her daughter, Jennifer Lynn Pitoniak, and her son, Dr. Nicholas J. Pirro.

Her work as an educator changed the lives of her students. Her words, lessons, and love continue to shape the lives of her children.

For A Letter to My Son, Nicholas, Lorraine's original writing has been preserved and adapted into poetic form by her son, Nicholas, allowing a mother's voice and the lessons she left behind to continue speaking long after the page on which they were first written.

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