

All Kinds of Mail

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I was amazed at the number of people who responded to the e-mail from an outraged parent that I shared yesterday....and many of them expressing the hope that Ip hadn't been too distressed by her message.

No, I have become quite sanguine when I receive (fortunately, not too many) such emails. I shrug them off but with the hope, always, that the child isn't too adversely affected. Sometimes I remember specific ones that worried me because of that possibility. For example:

This was in the winter about three years ago. I had rented a house in a warm place for three weeks, and had my laptop there with me, so could receive and reply to email.p A mother wrote, quite upset because her 10-year-old daughter had written me a letter ("real" mail) and had not yet received a reply. Her classmates (writing to an author had been an assignment) had all gotten letters back.

I explained to her, by email, that I was not at home, and so letters would be waiting for me there when I returned, and I would answer them as soon as I could. But it would be at least two weeks.

Indeed, when I got home, there was a huge stack of letters and I made my way through them as promptly as I could.p I had no idea which one was from her daughter because of course her email had not included the actual mailing address.p But apparently the child had written me a frequently-asked question, like "How did you get the idea for NUMBER THE STARS"?p and so she got, in reply, my form letter addressing that question. (If you get the same question 2,000 times, you can't answer it in innovative ways. There is really only one answer. Hence, the form letter)

So I got a second email from the mom, who was now absolutely furious that her child had not gotten a personal letter from me.p She said: "I'd like to rip off your face."

Goodness.p It did answer the question, though, of *Who are the people who appear on the Jerry Springer show?*

But it was very troubling. First, because in general it is a bad idea, I think, for a parent to undertake to fix a child's small woe. Her letter hadn't been answered in a timely fashion. She was disappointed. Frankly, I thought it was overstepping on the mother's part to try to intervene. That kid is eventually going to have to learn to deal with disappointments and to solve problems.p

But next: it was a truly horrible example set by the mom, to address her discontent in such a vicious way.

You have to wonder about what such a child grows into.

I'm grateful to say that most of my email, and regular mail, is courteous and genuinely heartfelt. I keep copies of the ones that I find particularly touching.p Here's a recent one:

I am a special education tutor.p Since September a seventeen-year-old student and I have been reading The Giver aloud and discussing it.p Today we finished the story!p It marked the first time this student has ever read an entire book since childhood.p Even though I gave him the opportunity to finish tomorrow, he was insistent on learning the ending.pp AND he rated the book "8" out of "10", which was high praise!p Thank you for the magic created by this novel.p It will surely be remembered by my student and me, both for its meaning as a piece of literature, and for its special import in his life!

So I don't dwell on the occasional letter that suggests -- as this recent one did -- that my mind is twisted and I need to seek help.

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