



# The Mother Letters

Sharing the  
Laughter, Joy,  
Struggles, and Hope

Amber C. Haines AND Seth Haines



Art & Photography  
by MORGAN DAY CECIL



*the  
Mother  
Letters*

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Laughter, Joy,  
Struggles, and Hope*

Amber C. Haines AND Seth Haines



*a division of Baker Publishing Group  
Grand Rapids, Michigan*

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To the mothers,  
especially our own—  
Susan and Tina



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# Preface

## *The Story behind* The Mother Letters

I watched my wife, Amber, in those early years of motherhood—those days spent trying to sort out the beautiful complexity of child rearing. They were a whirlwind of feeding, cleaning, and conflict resolution. Exhausted, Amber would often fall into bed at the end of the day.

I also watched the creeping doubts sneak up. “Am I doing this right?” she asked. “Am I good enough?”

In the Christmas season of 2008, Amber and I decided we would create presents for each other instead of braving the holiday rush with toddlers in tow. A stay-at-home mother with three

boys under the age of three, Amber needed a bit of motherly encouragement. So, I decided to curate a collection of letters written by mothers for other mothers. I hoped the letters would include words of encouragement and mothering wisdom while perhaps providing Amber a toehold for the hard days. And though I knew Amber—an unashamed lover of words—would appreciate this gift, I was not prepared for the response.

After collecting a few letters from close friends and relatives, I wrote to several of Amber's favorite bloggers and authors and asked whether they might consider submitting a letter. Within days, I received responses from Shannon Lowe and Ann Kroeker, each agreeing to contribute. Shannon, though, asked whether I had interest in collecting additional letters from mothers across the country. She asked whether she could promote the project on her blog, and I agreed.

The rest is history.

Over the next two months, letters poured in. Each letter represented a particular narrative, a different story. Some stories were joyful—the happiness of new life, the beauty in raising a child to maturity. Some stories were laden with grief—young children lost, older children estranged. But no matter the narrative, each letter conveyed encouragement, hope, and solidarity. Each story left one resounding impression—*we are all in this together*.

Amber and I have compiled this beautiful sampling of those first letters written in 2008, and we hope you'll find joy and encouragement in these pages. We hope you'll find strength in this collection, and that you'll pass that strength along to your sisters, friends, and your own mothers.

Thank you for being a part of the Mother Letters community. And remember, it needs your voice too.

Sincerely,

Seth

The Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory

Who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory

Who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory

1:4

Who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory

1:5

Who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory

1:6

Who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory  
who is the Father of glory



# Introduction

## *Believe*

*Dear Mother,*

When I first received the letters written by the hands and hearts of so many women, I said to myself, “I’m not even a mother. I’m a plain ol’ mama.” I had three small boys then, but I didn’t know what I was. I felt small and like a copycat, a woman just barely getting by. I didn’t learn to partake in motherhood until the voices who gathered at this fellowship table acknowledged me as one. What a powerful thing to be called: mother.

Now I’ve given birth to my fourth son, and every day I learn all the more from these letters, these voices of truth that have pushed me on to greatness. During my fourth labor, I found—with my swaying hips, with the way my neck held on to my bobbing head and my eyes stayed in their sockets—that

it sometimes takes the full strength of motherkind to not push, to merely breathe. I found then that I didn't have to agree with the truth for the truth to be true. I am a mother, and a mother is amazing. Her love is a lion.

Though voices of doubt in my head said my son would never come, after intense hours of unbelief, after my dearest ones laid hands on me and their strong voices said, "Yes, you can," and after only minutes of pushing, there on the wild-eyed table was born into music and air my beautiful fourth-born son—

and was also born a hush to my soul,  
the clarity of thumping hormones  
—the lick, the purr, the pink skin crying.  
The flash of ancient memory. Land of Milk and Honey.

Since then, with every passing, vigilant grog of night, through nursing and then when he didn't grow and we thought we would lose him, through weeks in the hospital, I had to come to the truth again and again. I'm a mother. I can do this—four boys, plodding ahead past the voices of doubt and toward voices of truth.

I push away that woman in my imagination who tells me who I'm supposed to be if I want to be "good," to be doing it right. I push away even what I think another mother's life seems to be, the vacuum lines in her carpet.

But here gather, mother, women who are for you, women confessing how little any of us know and how precious it is to be right where we are and who we are. When they tell me the truth about who they are and who I am, they change lives.

Your voices change lives.

I'm a mother, and I'm also a curator now. My husband and I have gathered for you in these letters the intricacies of a mother's life. *We are art—and we make art.* The rests we take, the line breaks. The images we snap with our phones and the ones we hold as the centerpieces for our minds. The scenes that reel and the way food lands on the plate—this is *art*.

In the image of our Creator, we mothers are artists, creating tiny people in our bodies and then gathering bits and pieces of anything on hand to keep them occupied. You should have seen my mama with a roll of tinfoil. You should see the artwork on my refrigerator.

Yourstory is a powerful reflection of glory. You don't have to believe it for it to be true, but by the time you finish reading this book, I hope you'll believe it a little more.

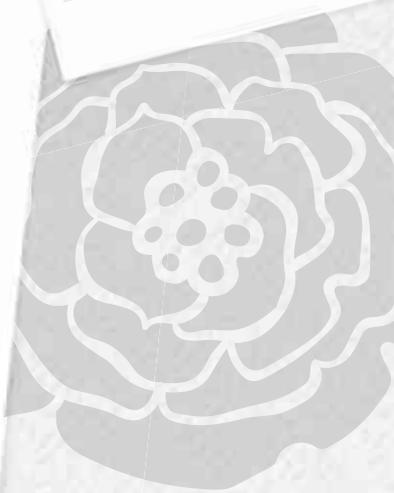
Believing for you,

*Amber Haines*

from [AmberHaines.com](http://AmberHaines.com)

We all know they  
grow up fast. All  
the more reason  
to  
Slow  
down.

~ Ann



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# Blink

Dear Mother,

\*Blink\*

That's how fast it happens. I'm sure you've noticed it. When you brought home your newborn, you probably fell into some kind of rhythm and routine. Next thing you know . . .

\*Blink\*

Baby starts rolling over. And crawling.

\*Blink\*

Now he's toddling and talking.

\*Blink\*

First day of first grade: he climbs onto the school bus with a cartoon-emblazoned lunch box in hand, turns around to wave, smiles, and “catches” every kiss you blow.

\*Blink\*

Eighth grade: he shuffles onto the school bus jamming to an iPod and glances back, hoping you don't embarrass him publicly.

\*Blink\*

"Mom, can I have the car keys?"

\*Blink\*

You're shopping for extralong twin sheets for dorm room beds.

Okay, I'm only speculating about the car keys and sheets. I'm not quite there yet—but it's coming. Soon. I know, because I've blinked.

\*Blink\*

Other moms warned me about the mom-blink.

"Enjoy them while they're little," they'd advise. "Savor every moment now, because you just blink, and . . . oh, they grow up so fast!"

I appreciated the sentiment, but no one would tell me *how*.

*How* was I supposed to *savor* changing three-ton diapers, mopping spit-up off the kitchen floor, and chasing after my toddler only to find him splashing his hands in the toilet water?

*How* was I supposed to enjoy them while facing a mountain of laundry and so tired the only way I could keep my eyes open was to prop them up with toothpicks and guzzle a jug of black tea. *How?*

I'm the mother of two teens, an eleven-year-old, and a seven-year-old, so I can attest to what those moms were saying: they *do* grow up in the blink of an eye. But I would like to offer something no one managed to pass on to me—an idea of *how* to enjoy and savor the kids while they're little.

*I suppose it sounds like a no-brainer, but here it is: slow down.*

Does that sound obvious? Forgive me, but it took me a little while to “get it.”

I had to *choose* to slow down enough to look each child in the eye.

I had to remember to slow down enough to smile, to laugh, to relax . . . to *breathe deeply*.

In the early days of parenting, I wasn't slowing down enough to listen to what my girls were really saying. I needed to learn to ask a follow-up question and listen a little longer.

I grew to love slowing down enough to read a story—slowly, more than once. And to play a round of UNO or Monopoly. (That takes awhile!) I love living slowly enough to sit down for a meal at the table and give thanks.

You might already slow down enough to let your kids enjoy some free time to play uninterrupted. You've seen them build an imaginary fortress or fairyland, and your schedule might

be flexible enough to just hang out with them and watch them build. Instead of dragging them off to the umpteenth organized activity, you might be living slowly enough to take them sledding.

No, wait a minute. If you're already living that slowly, you know you can let your husband take them sledding.

While you sit and sip hot tea.

And while you're sitting there sipping tea, or coffee, or chai—not because you need the caffeine, but to enjoy the flavor and the smell and the feel of the warm mug against your hands—you are slowing down. You're stopping—stopping to savor these moments of motherhood that race past in a blink.

When you slow down like that, when for a few minutes you forget Mount Laundry and the blob of spit-up on the kitchen floor, life isn't such a blur.

*Living a slower life, you can see things more clearly.* You'll sit in the quiet and look out the window—really look—at the snow angels and lumpy snowmen formed by mittened hands in the backyard.

You can *feel*.

You can pray for your children—for their hearts, their souls, their just-a-blink-away futures.

And when you do this, when you slow down like this, it's okay to go ahead and blink. You can even shut your eyes for

a few minutes and recall a look or a lisp or a laugh. You aren't missing anything at all.

Enjoy the peace.

Later you'll open your eyes when the kids and your husband tumble in the back door, chunks of snow dropping from their snowsuits and boots. They'll beg you for hot chocolate and popcorn. You'll look at their pink-cheek grins and chattering teeth and crazy hair smashed and smooshed by their knit caps, and you'll sigh. *This. This* is what those moms meant. And thank the Lord your life was slow enough to see it and savor it—and so was theirs.

*This is how.*

We all know they grow up fast.

All the more reason to *slow down*.

Ann Kroeker