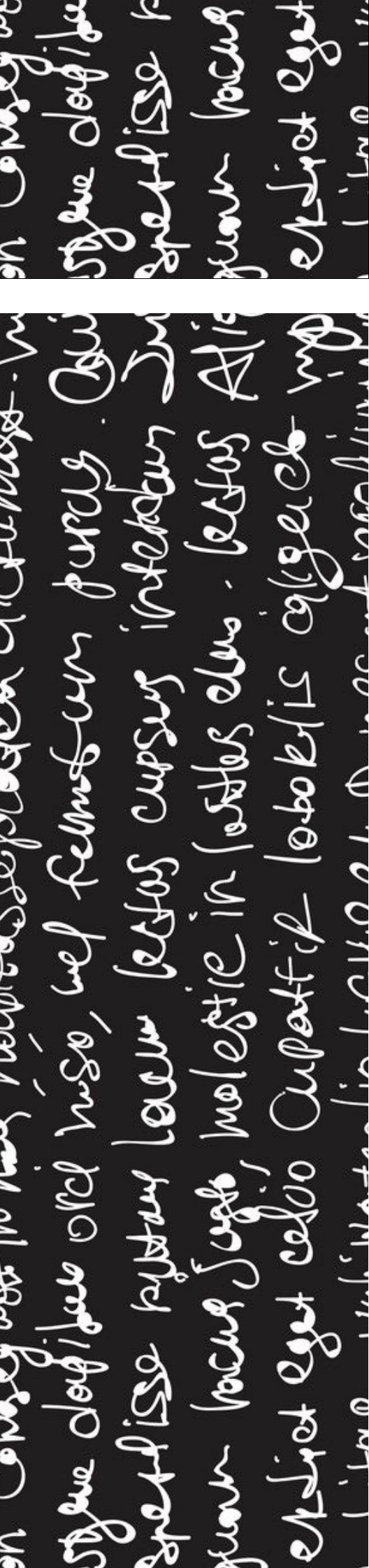




Dear Mom,

I've pondered on what to give you for your birthday. I've never been a good gift-giver so this has been a challenge for me. After giving it some thought, I decided probably the best thing I could do would be to give you my thanks and appreciation for helping me find my way in this world. That's something I don't think I've done well enough over the years.

So here goes.

As hard as I tried to push you away when I wasn't sure who I was, you were there to remind me. Thank you for being my guide. When I lost my way and wasn't sure if life had a place for me, you were still there for me. I know I was not an easy child. Throughout though, you have always been there to let me lean on you.

Now that I have children of my own, I truly understand the extent of stress and worry this must have caused you. I am sorry you watched your child struggle while you had to bear the emotional burden of it all. I can't thank you enough for staying by my side throughout some of the most challenging days of my life. Thank you for not giving up on me when I felt my most fragile and imperfect.

Thank you for showing me it's okay to make mistakes. And that there's always a lesson to learn from them. You have shown me the importance of owning up to my faults, whether intentional or not. I'm so grateful to you for encouraging me to be thoughtful and to reflect on myself and my actions. You have shown me that growth is just as important as success. You have taught me that embracing these lessons will allow me to come out on the other side of hardships better and stronger. Thank you for showing me that my past does not define me and that it is up to me to make positive choices, and changes, for myself.

Thank you for not being overwhelmed or intimidated by my emotions - even though you often felt or believed different. You were able to create a safe "holding environment" for my emotions, until they passed. That taught me to not only trust myself, but that all emotions come and go and that I am able to survive the challenging moments of life.

Thank you for showing me that it's okay to put myself first - that taking care of myself helps me to better take care of my kids. You have led by example modeling how investing in myself is as empowering for my children as is my support. You've taught me that healthy self-care is important. Most of all, you've shown me the importance of creating balance for myself. I now understand that allowing space for my wellness, whether it be a bath or a new hobby, is something to be proud of.

You have shown me that love is about being genuine—by giving a piece of yourself without expecting a piece in return. That love is about being compassionate, while also setting boundaries. That love is about challenging each other to be their best selves. You continue to show me that love is about lifting one another up but understanding that sometimes we might fall.

Really, what it all boils down to is that you were and are, the most magnificent mom I could have asked for. Beautiful, smart, devoted, funny, caring and everything else any child could want, all wrapped up in a flannel housecoat and a smile. You are seldom far from my thoughts and never out of my heart. I wanted to write these words on paper so that you could always have them close at hand, especially when I'm far away and don't call as often as I should. I want you to always know that I love you and cherish you more than life itself. Whenever I cook a meal, read a book, or just feel the sunshine on my face, I am feeling you and the love you always showed me.

Thank you that I can know you feel the same. Love ever and always.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to the author of the letter.