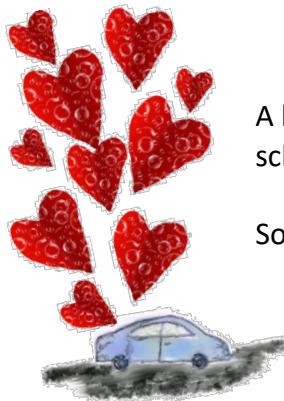


I have never been a painter. I have always been a painter. Just not with paint.
My paintbrush was life, my canvas was work, family, work, friends and more work.

Get up at six, get breakfast for four,
get kids ready, pack and leave,
always a few minutes late.



Jagged
black brush strokes across a grey background, suddenly
interrupted by a bright confetti splash of Fruit Loops spilled on the floor.



A battered blue car badly parked on a crowded
school parking lot.

“Bye Mommy, I love you!”
Soft bubbles rising in a heart shape from the
tired little car.



Where is he? I have to teach evening class tonight, and it's
5:30. Two small children and he's not home from work yet.
The children are latched to my ankles like a ball and chain,
while I'm reaching out for a shimmering golden paycheck
with one hand, and handing the 13-year-old next door \$10
with the other.



“I really loved your class this semester.” A shy co-ed – me a generation earlier, discovering a
passion for learning. My ego swells like a flower, a rosebud opening gratefully to the
pleasure of a shared faith.



My daughter is on stage. It's a musical. She joins in a duet, her voice clear and uplifting.
All I hear is nightingales, dozens of them. They sing of my pride, my love, my heart dousing
out its deepest fears.

It's 3:30 and I'm more than exhausted from a day of school. I'm as battered as my old car sputtering on
fumes. I was a huge chocolate chip
cookie in the morning, now I'm just crumbs. Noise, conflict,
chaos, noise, time pressure, lost papers, noise and a
supervision duty when I should have been eating lunch.
Bite,

bite,
crumble,
crumble ... gone.



I turn off the lights, hide under my desk.
Cry.

“Daddy, Daddy, I’m angry!” And I watch as my grown son sits his three-year-old son on his lap and listens to him cry. My son smooths his child’s hair and murmurs the words that will calm my grandson, make him feel loved, help him grow up. My heart breaks into pieces, each piece sure that the whole painting has been rescued by this one moment.

I will not erase my canvas just because I’ve retired. I do not feel the need to start a new one, as if I were re-embarking on youthful adventures. No, it is time to reflect on the memories, add to the colors, and to learn from the mosaic of my own past. It is time to apologize for acts of weakness, appreciate contributions I have might have made to the world around me, and savor the opportunities I might still have to add depth, color, perspective, wisdom and gratitude to the panorama of my life’s painting.

May it be so.

