

Dear Teachers,

Last night, at the Barron home in Colorado, my children lit another candle. Carefully, they placed it on the windowsill above the kitchen counter. The light wavered a little, but shone through the glass and out into the world beyond.

I thought of that candle today as I sat to write this, thought of small hands lighting that candle. And those thoughts turned to you, to what you do daily, to the flames you light in our children, to the light you help nourish in each. You have always done it, really, lighting the candles in young people. But in the past week, you have done it with extraordinary grace and compassion and courage and professionalism. You have lit our children's candles, and kept them aflame, even when the winds of horror and cruelty have blown their very hardest.

I want to thank you—both as a writer and as a parent—for being there this past week with our nation's children, for showing such devotion to our most vulnerable. For bringing such humanity and true goodness into their lives. For lighting so many candles.

In my books, I often write about heroic young people, boys and girls who have overcome some major obstacle in their lives. In every case, these characters accomplish this task by reaching far inside themselves and finding unknown reserves of courage, wisdom, and devotion to those they love. Clearly, this journey of the hero is a metaphor for life, not just for characters who ride on dragons and whisper to unicorns, but for all of us. And there is nothing more heroic than the teacher who helps a young person discover those vast reserves inside himself or herself, who gives him hope when all seems hopeless, who shows her dreams in the midst of nightmares, and teaches us all to face fear with strong determination. You have been that hero.

Thank you so very much,
T. A. Barron

Dear Teachers,

As I'm writing this, I'm sitting in my new office in my new apartment in Brooklyn, New York.

My view is one I've always wanted—the New York City skyline. We all know how that skyline changed on September 11, 2001. I walk up here now and am reminded every day of just how important it is to work with children. I am reminded, too, of the wretched power of evil and hate that visited each one of us, and continues to do so. It is a tall order to not be afraid right now. You'll read this letter in December; I'm writing it in September. Perhaps my thoughts will change a bit over the next months. Perhaps they will not.

I want to thank you for being in your classrooms on the day that changed America. I've thought often of what was required of you that day. You had to deal with the tragedy personally; you were the person the children looked up to. I well remember when I was twelve and President Kennedy was shot. I was in math class. My math teacher came into the room crying and told us the news. She was pregnant and she held her stomach like she

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teacher and a coward.**

—Joan Bauer

was trying to shield her unborn baby from the pain. She stood before us and wept. I remember the funeral procession in Washington, the pictures, the loss, but a huge part of that tragedy for me has always been defined by Mrs. Brown's courage to cry and not leave the room. I remember another teacher storming through the halls—furious, sad. Both responses were valid, real, and necessary. The commitment to walk into a classroom each day and teach children whatever comes, whatever madness the world throws at you, is an act of supreme love and courage. It is impossible to be a teacher and a coward.

I do believe each one of you was there with your gifts and your personalities for such a time as this. I believe you were placed right on the battle line to hold back the full intent of that evil from spreading. I believe that now you are fighting with renewed passion against hate. I know you're tired. I know you want to shield each and every student from malevolence and the horror of war. I also know that there are so many ways in which you have shown your students that this monstrosity won't be the final word. "Mankind has been di-