Thanks for Not Killing My Son

All we know about Rita Schindler is what she herself says in her letter. It was a student who noticed “Thanks for Not Killing My Son” in the “Have Your Say” feature of the December 30, 1990, Toronto Star. He tore it out and brought it to his writing teacher, explaining what a fine argument it was. The teacher agreed. By the time the editor of this book tried to reach Ms. Schindler, though, the Star had discarded her address. None of the many Schindlers listed in the Toronto phone book knew her, and the hospital mentioned in her letter would not divulge information. The publisher even talked with a detective agency. Finally, though, the Copyright Board of Canada gave permission to reprint the letter, as it can do in such cases. We sincerely believe that Ms. Schindler would want her eloquent and highly principled argument made available to more persons of her son’s generation. If you happen to know her, please show her this book and ask her to contact the publisher, who will direct her to the government office where her author’s fee is waiting.

I hope you will print my letter of gratitude to the strangers who have affected our lives.

Sometime between 1:30 p.m., Dec. 8, and 1 a.m., Dec. 9, a young man was viciously attacked — beaten and kicked unconscious for no apparent reason other than walking by you on a public sidewalk.

He was left lying in a pool of blood from an open head wound — in the Victoria Park-Terraview area. He was found around 1 a.m. and taken to Scarborough General Hospital where ironically his mother spent 48 hours in labor before giving him birth, 23 years earlier.

His mother is angry of course, but thankful for the following reasons.

First of all — his eye socket was shattered and hemorrhaging but his eyesight will not be affected. Thank you.

His ear canal was lacerated internally from a tremendous blow to the side of his head. The cut could not be stitched and the bleeding was difficult to stop. But his eardrum seems to be undamaged — thank you.

He required numerous stitches to his forehead, temple and face but your boots didn’t knock one tooth out — thank you. His head was swollen almost twice its size — but Mom knew that his brain was intact — for he held her hand for six hours as he lay on a gurney, by the nurses station, I.V. in his arm — his head covered and crustted with dried blood — waiting for x-ray results and the surgeon to stitch him up.

So, thank you for this eyesight, his hearing and his hands which you could have easily crushed.

His hands — human hands — the most intricately beautiful and complex instruments of incredible mechanism — the result of billions of years of evolution — and you people used yours to beat another human being. Five guys and two girls to beat one person. Who do I thank? Did you know he was a talented young musician with a budding career — and that playing his keyboards and piano mean more to him than my words can say.

And when his friends were talking about revenge, I heard him say, “No, I don’t want someone else’s mother to go through what mine has.” That’s who you were kicking in the head. And so — I thank you for not causing the most horrible and devastating thing that can happen to any parent — that is — the untimely tragic loss of a child — at any age.

You could have kicked him to death but you only left him to die, thank you. A person found him and called for help.

I am his mother — and I have been given a second chance — thanks to you.

I hope that someday you’ll have children and love them as much as I love mine — but I wouldn’t wish on your child what you did to mine.

Rita Schindler
Scarborough

Explorations:

1. Schindler’s argument is cast as a letter. For what “audience” is it meant?
2. Schindler organizes her letter by examining in turn each injury inflicted on her son. Point out each. What proportion of the letter’s content is given to these examples? Could the point have been made without them?