**They Have Changed Me For Good**

*Michelle Hebert Russo*

*I'd never been to a child's funeral,*

*never watched a mother*

*mourn for her baby.*

I'm a teacher. I'm not their mother, but they are my kids. I don't always know their parents or siblings or what happens outside of school, but I'm with them every day, almost all day, for nine months each year. I watch them grow, change, and embrace their individualities. I know them. They are my own.

*I'd never been to a child's funeral,*

*never saw other children*

*weep for the passing of a soul*

*so close to their own.*

Each day, I see who they are, who they can be, and what they can become. I know their fears and their joys. I see their kindness, even when they are mean and spiteful. I see their uniqueness despite how they conform. I feel their frustrations and worry about them when they aren't with me. I see their quiet and their secrets. I see their tears; my heart breaks with theirs.

*I'd never been to a child's funeral,*

*never felt such injustice,*

*such confusion,*

*such anger,*

*such sorrow.*

I see their confusion and their searching. I search with them, dreading their failures and hoping for their successes. I see the masks they put on and what they hide from. I see what their interests are and what intrigues them. I know who makes their heart flutter and when they are hurt. I see their lack of confidence, their anxieties, and their potential. I want for them. Their hopes become mine as I look toward their futures, wishing I had the power to give them all they dream of, knowing when they walk out of my door, I can no longer help them; I cannot protect them.

*I'd never been to a child's funeral,*

*never found a way to describe*

*the power that kind of*

*sadness has.*

I see them sparkle and shine, watching how smooth and gentle they can be. I see their brightness and their innocence. I watch them inspire others as they inspire me. I see their light and their dark and love them more for both. They are gifts in my life for brief moments in time.

*I'd never been to a child's funeral,*

*never will forget*

*the way*

*it changed me.*

They move me and transform me. They change my life for good. I know that they have to leave me. They move on with their lives, their education, their plans, and their futures.

*I'd never been to a child's funeral,*

*never saw a future*

*die.*