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THAT FEARSOME FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL



Photo for the Tribune by Will Kamin

School sweethearts

Entering a new world, with love in pocket

By Barbara Mahany

The little red heart is the size of a button. So is its twin, the other half of its whole. When the sun peeks in the boy's room, when he bounds out of bed and into his school clothes, he'll slip his into his pocket. So will his mama. I promised I would.

A heart in your pocket is a very good thing. Especially on the very first day, the very first long day, when the time stretches beyond saying goodbye at the school door, way past lunch in a lunchroom and scrambling all over at recess, way past standing in lines and marching through halls, past sitting in chairs and reaching in desks and finding a locker you barely know how to use.

A heart in your pocket is a very good thing. You give it a squeeze when you need to. You give it a squeeze when you're sad. Or you're wobbly. You give it a squeeze when you're certain that its powers will work like a cell phone, connect you in

magical ways, without dialing. And the heart on the other end will be there, will know that you're calling.

Because hearts in the pocket are like that. They connect you.

And when you are 6, and going off in the world for the very first time, when the lumps in your tummy and the ones in your throat are so big you think they might choke you. Or send you flying to the boys' room, way, way down the hall, before it's too late.

The need for a heart, the need for a something, became wholly apparent the night before school, there in the dark.

That's when your heart's bared. That's when all that is hiding comes out of the shadows. That's when the things that behave all through the day come haunting. They decide in the nighttime they want to romp in your head.

That's when the feet came. Tiptoeing down the stairs, around the corner, right to my side. That's when the words came too: "Mama, I need to talk to you about something really serious about school. 'I think I'll be homesick.'"

That was Round 1. Before it was ended we had

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Barbara Mahany is a Tribune staff reporter. A version of this essay originally appeared on her Web site, www.pullupachair.org.

A POLITICAL CAREER STALLS OUT



The arrest report of Republican Sen. Larry Craig proves an interesting read, especially for an Idaho Democrat. **PAGE 3**

LEAVING BEHIND MICHAEL VICK'S NO. 7

Lesson on how our heroes fall is bitter not just for the young

By John Keilman

As cameras whirred and clicked like a swarm of insects, disgraced NFL star Michael Vick stood behind a bank of microphones last week and gravely reeled off apologies to the league, his fellow Atlanta Falcons and the fans — especially the smallest ones.

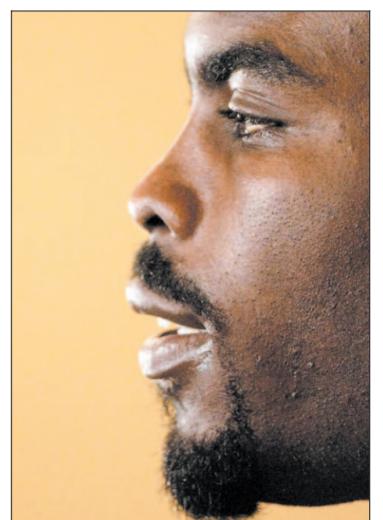
"I want to apologize to all the young kids out there for my immature acts," he said after pleading guilty to running a dog-fighting outfit. "If I'm more disappointed with myself than anything it's because of all the young people, young kids that I've

let down, who look at Michael Vick as a role model."

One of those young kids was my 4-year-old son, Ian.

Since age 2, Ian has worn Vick's No. 7 jersey, a present I bought him during a trip to Atlanta. Vick's freewheeling sandlot style reminded me of the games I played as a little kid, when sports were only about having fun. I wanted Ian to share that attitude, so I was happy when the jersey became his favorite piece of clothing, and when he started pointing out the quarterback in the flurry of ESPN highlights.

"Michael Vick," he would say with abso-



Getty Images photo by Win McNamee

John Keilman is a Tribune staff reporter.

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