

## IT IS WHAT IT IS

So I block out my schizophrenic  
daughter-in-law's impact on my ten grandkids,  
loved, but enraged by their un-tethered world,  
no rules to ground them—  
their mother's mind as disarrayed as their dish-cluttered kitchen,  
while two dishwashers sit empty,  
and four laundry baskets over-flow,  
mixed, clean with dirty.  
Doing laundry gives Sarah confidence,  
a sense of order—she knows how to toss  
clothes into the washer, from washer to dryer.  
But folding, sorting, putting into drawers  
is a foreign language her fingers cannot learn.  
It's July in Israel but winter quilts bedeck each bed  
in an un-air-conditioned home,  
flannel pajamas are put on kids too young to understand seasons.  
(My son limits his opposition to the most crucial events. He has given up  
morning prayers in Shul to make sure his tardy children, evicted  
from school, now arrive on time. He seeks help from his psychologist-aunt  
when family conflicts turn into wars. With remarkable skill he implements  
suggestions that reduce the need for high powered weapons).  
Bedwetting creates comforting heaps of to-do wash, cluttering the laundry room.  
When alone, two-year-old Chavy finds it fun to climb  
atop her highchair tray and reach above the fridge to grab  
eggs from their crates and drop them, to watch them splat on the floor.  
Mother won't scold, or say *No*, or wash the mess.  
It stays a day or two till my son gives in, or her mother comes to clean.  
The clamor of her mind clogs all the hours of the day,  
and forms operatic overtures at bedtime  
or morning-prep time before school.  
I tell my son, *I have yet to see the eight-month-old,  
in the toyless crib, eat solid food.*  
I buy a guaranteed-strong teething ring with playthings,  
the next morning it lies crushed on the floor.  
Demands, tempers, screams fill each room,  
emanate from the six younger kids who still defy all Sarah says,  
and goad her to a higher octave she is guaranteed to reach.  
Each child finds its way to channel anger.  
Five boys urine-spray the bathroom floor despite  
their learned good aim into the center of the bowl.  
The stench, a testament to their wrath,  
goes unnoticed by their mother.  
The egg-tosser spits onto the floor  
what she does not want to eat, including fruit pits.  
No child fully owns anything—  
each wants what another has,  
grabs it, breaks it, or the chase begins,  
followed by slaps and screams.  
Sarah does cook well

but the children seldom sit at the table—  
forked schnitzel or vegetables are eaten  
like ice cream pops as they walk from room to room.  
Cupcakes, candy, chips are taken and eaten any time of day.  
I order pizza—like jackals they snatch,  
empty the boxes, some hold two slices while Fayga has none.  
Her screams, like needles in the ears, force no sharers.  
Mom smiles, shrugs, tells Fayga to stop the noise.  
I send Fayga to the store with money to buy just hers.  
Then a visit to the zoo—like lower-ranked chimps  
tormented by those higher up,  
these kids chase, taunt, kick the goats,  
slap the lemurs, till guards oust them.  
I hate who they've become  
but remind myself, trained by chaos,  
it's hard to find a self in a shapeless home,  
each needs a target to gain stature, power, locate themselves.  
My son understands, even with anti-psychotics  
Sarah remains *handicapped*.  
She will read to them or paint with them,  
try her best, but can't say *No* to a child,  
or pair socks, or clean up splinters from broken glass.  
I brace myself for my rare visits  
where I am powerless as she, as their ten kids, as my son.  
Mostly I witness or hide as I repeat the mantra—*It is what it is*,  
and remind myself, many emerge from bedlam  
magically less scathed than one would expect.  
I had hoped for all my offspring of each generation  
to reach adulthood more whole than I.

## AN ACCOUNTING ON TURNING AWAY

Nothing is learned by turning away—  
I stare hard at  
the woman in the mirror and tell her  
*You don't understand the impact  
of not embracing  
often.*

Much is lost by turning away—  
I look again into the mirror,  
*Think of all that you have  
lost by your reticence, your unwillingness  
to let the cat, the wolf, and the lamb  
leap out of your pen.*

So much is saved by turning away  
I think, holding in my extremes—  
*But what has accrued  
when you refused the roller coaster,  
left it to others to ride  
shrieking and giggling?*

If I could route out my child years  
I could love with abandon;  
instead I remain earthbound,  
but with a loyal partner who often  
lifts me a bit into the air.

With the wisdom of the unconscious,  
at nineteen my needs were suddenly met.  
Attending Herb's school of love  
I learned many of the songs of trees and flowers.  
Sometimes I depart from logic  
to let my mind fly  
into the stratosphere of poetry.

I have taken into account  
all the pluses and minuses—  
not turning away  
builds assets.

## TYRANNICAL ROBIN—MY APOLOGIES

### I

Thwap-you fling yourself  
then defy gravity,  
pronged feet tap-tapping  
as you climb.

On rainy days,  
mud-tracks  
your calling card.  
I want my windows and sills  
unmarred by your splat.

Your glorious body  
more detailed than in  
a time-lapsed film—  
your orange breast  
lacquered by glass sheen  
but your rapid click-clack  
heard from anywhere in my house  
drives me mad.

It's three weeks now that you  
don't permit my car to be outside.  
Those first few days I worried—  
do you have a brain tumor,  
have your nesting instincts gone berserk,  
such force with your delicate wings.  
I ran around closing all the blinds,  
depriving myself of lake and wood scenes.

Your reflection is not a rival  
trying to steal your lady or chicks.  
Lunatic, birdbrain, get out of my space.

I've hosed my car six times,  
now it's a shut-in.  
I've leaned plywood against the six foot high  
garage window, closed the laundry room blinds.  
My home is no photo lab.  
I want daylight as much as you do.  
I don't shake your pines.

Have respect  
for the property of others.  
Even if your kin landed at Plymouth Rock  
or frolicked in the oak and spruce  
I cleared to gain a lake view,  
this is my property.  
Ask my lawyer!

Section Break

## II

My mistake!  
I misread your actions,  
white striping my car  
when my concern for your tiny bones  
sourred to a more pungent anger  
with each passing day.  
Then you and your defiling streaks  
arrived again this spring—

I fantasized a BB gun,  
and cursed you, but  
*Googled* “bird deterrents”  
to stop your attacks,  
not deter your friends singing  
and flitting about my yard.  
Suddenly, *nest* popped out  
from my screen.

Aha!  
I think, babies, and move  
my car to the other side  
of the driveway. Again you’re  
a model resident. I’m sorry  
I spread false rumors  
of your bad behavior  
to my friends.  
When you stained my possessions  
I shrilled, *Cease and desist*,  
but, your persistent bravery  
is to be applauded.

I’ll spread the word through blogs—  
it is I who am dense.  
You and your cousins merely want  
consideration for your nursery-homes.  
People should adapt to your spring needs.  
When fledglings mature we can revert  
to our regular parking spots.  
Stalwart parent, your consistent demands  
have at last made me understand.

## IT RHYMES WITH—SHINE

I woke up to *Nine* on the brain;  
actually, Jen was shouting 9,  
and I asked why.  
She answered, *You figure it out*,  
so I did.

9, mate it with another,  
turn the first curvaceous number  
upside down—supine,  
this couple becomes 69.  
Must everything turn  
into sex?

When I was 9,  
my fourteen-year-old sister  
and her friend told me about  
a man sticking it inside  
a woman. That grossed me out.

Luckily hormones change  
one's thinking and appetite.  
*I dressed to the nines*  
preparing for the nuptial bed.

Marketers understand the value of 9  
paired. They price merchandise  
with these twins no matter the dollar size,  
making 9 the most used number.

9, the highest single digit—  
 $9+1=$  double digits;  $99+1=$  triple digits,  
ad infinitum.

9 rhymes with fermented grapes,  
the *wine* of Chablis,  
and with the *whine* of a baby.

9 bovines pine for a sign of that huge stein  
filled with wine-soaked twine.  
As they dine  
they play in grime and spend much time  
on dreams of 9 more pints of brine.

My only crime in my design of rhyme,  
I count a mere 8 stanzas  
and decline to be one short—  
thus add these lines to climb  
to the sublime 9.

**IN RESPONSE TO THE—*JUST JUBILATION GOSPEL CHOIR***

I don't understand how  
you kept your faith,  
how you kept your song,  
why you wanted to wake each day.

Your misery multiplied  
by all those around you  
in the Middle Voyage,  
on the selling block,  
in the fields,  
flesh torn by a whip,  
your backs arched  
as you picked cotton,  
long days slowed by sun's heat.

I don't understand how  
you kept your faith,  
how you kept your song,  
why you wanted to wake each day,  
after being in a bed  
under your master's weight.

I was not yet born,  
but I am perplexed that  
some of my people also sang  
in the ghettos, in the camps.

I never saw God,  
never heard God,  
never believed  
there was anyone who'd help me,  
yet I too was willing  
to wake most days.

At home, super-obedient,  
but I could not learn  
how to stay beyond the reach  
of father's swinging hand.

Your abuse was public,  
mine, mostly in the dark of night,  
no one to witness  
except for my twin,  
Daddy's other girl, too loyal,  
too scared to notice,  
though we shared a bedroom.

Page Break

My misery lived  
inside the walls of home. I woke each weekday  
knowing I'd escape—  
walking to school with friends,  
and my twin.

My reprieve was also in the classroom,  
all those kids with only one adult,  
so few rules, easy to be approved of—  
do homework, raise a hand,  
read aloud, and recess—a playground  
where I could run in any direction.

Evenings, nights, weekends,  
time was slowed by fear,  
but schooldays, outside,  
time raced by,  
I was not alone,  
not silent, not numb.

Today, hearing  
your gospel songs,  
still wondering how  
your songs and faith survived—  
I realize I had faith—  
faith in the chalk-lined boxes  
we girls drew on concrete  
to play hopscotch in,  
faith in friends' moms who  
gave us red or yellow Jell-O  
or ice cream though it wasn't a holiday.

I heard my song in the rhythm  
of opposing jump ropes,  
Double Dutching,  
slap-slapping the ground,  
leaving space for me  
to jump between;  
my song in the squeak of the swing-seat  
against the ropes I held  
as I kicked my feet higher,  
higher, head back,  
feet toward blue sky,  
and the sound—the pop of my hand  
against a pink rubber ball,  
I had faith in my swift legs  
running around the bases,  
my heart pumping with fun.