

what it is is beautiful



*honest poems for mothers
of small children*

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PEACE HILL PRESS

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INTRODUCTION

I don't know about you, but I had no idea that becoming a parent would affect my brain as much as it did. We had three babies in three years, and suddenly my life boiled down to pure survival.

I've often told myself to just slog through these days—washing faces, reading stories, saying bedtime prayers. There is a sweetness to it all, which I can usually remember, once everyone's asleep and the house is finally still.

I began writing these poems two years ago, when our twins were three years old and our firstborn was six. I longed to re-engage my brain and my heart with the work of mothering. I needed to discover what was poetic about this overwhelmingly repetitive life.

This book is the beginning of that journey. I'd be honored if you joined me.

– Sarah
April 2012

WELCOME TO FACEBOOK

She wrote on my wall:
i luv mama
(which melted my heart)
but it took forty minutes
of sustained elbow grease
to coax the crayon off.

She poked me
over and over
after crawling into bed
with cold feet
and a sagging diaper
(at six in the morning).

“I’m not your friend anymore!”
she shrieked savagely
after I put her in time-out
for the third time—
I’m thinking, maybe I should join
the real thing?

BOOK LEARNING

It unfolded so fast
past the hour of the nap
they never take:
one kid goaded the other,
who naturally sank her teeth
in the arm of her foe.

All I could think
was that justice
must be meted out,
and I'm supposed to do it.
But I stood still,
paralyzed—

not by the shrill howl
or the shaky hiccups,
but by the conflicting
voices of well-intentioned
parenting books

(with their absolute
confidence, catchy titles,
and celebrity review blurbs),

each forbidding
a different course
of action:

*Don't let it slide;
she'll become
a holy terror!
Don't spank her;
she'll choose violence
to solve her troubles!
Don't pay her extra attention;
she'll learn to act out
to get more!
Don't banish her to her room;
she'll multiply her feelings
of isolation!*

So to quiet all the voices,
I yelled at my holy terror,
then wrapped my arms
around her, and
together
we bawled.

DINNER AT HOME

The work of the day
is over—
but there is still
the matter of
dinner.

Sometimes,
we succumb
to the drive-thru—
scarfing burgers
in the car,
grease dripping down
the backs of our hands.
Throwing french fries
to appease the backseat.
My stomach tenses up
from suspense, bracing
for the next bite, gulp,
or pothole in the road.

Rare are the nights
we eat out, without kids.
I wait for it all day, letting
my thirst for red wine
and hunger for red meat
grow without apology.

I savor the ordering
of food prepared
by other hands;
you feast on the distance
from our sink of dishes.

But most evenings
find us at home,
pulling together a meal
out of something old
and something new.
Papers must be pushed aside,
projects relocated.
I call up the stairs to
come eat, right this minute!

From the hungry sprinters
to the stragglers
reluctantly parting
with toys, books
or screens,
we find our seats
at the table,
bow our heads.
We take,
and we eat.