

**Thundering Back
for my father, and now, myself, on receiving the
Parkinson's diagnosis**

The doctors say a storm is headed your way
that your home is in its path
and you're forbidden to leave.

They say nothing you do
can stop it
but they won't tell you

which walls will crumble
or when,
or whether you
will be left standing
or not.

Already thunder
shudders through the doors.
Already, uneasy clouds darken the sky..
Already the air is misting with fine, delicate drops.
They are seeping through cracks in rooms
you took for granted, rooms you planned
to expand, planned
to grow old in.
Breath held, you search every corner
for damage, overlook nothing, and find
that this storm is the bad dream
you will not
wake up from.

Waking

The rabbis say
that we are never tested
beyond our capabilities.
They tell us,
"Incessant trials are a sign
of the innate potential
which God invests in a person."

Perhaps, then,
there is a Jewish way to live alongside this disease?
Perhaps, outside of this private nightmare
are other gentler dreams,
and on the 'good days,'
my home can be cleaned and swept
and strengthened.
After all, my son and the woman I love
still need to be fed,
and held.

And there are others to heal:
the friend whose marriage wears its own fragile walls,
another with a second cancer,
two with mothers
who no longer remember their names,

and my mother --who is still trying to rouse my father
to give him his pill.
As for me, I can still drive
to see him,
to bring him the grandson he asks for
before sleep.

My Guides

-Ellen, the rabbi,
who suggested, in that first week
that I shake my fist, and I did.
I thundered back
at the coming storm.

The women and men who trudge to my office
with souls and bodies scorched,
bearing small hopes in outstretched palms.
I guide them/ am now guided
by them.

The friend with 2 rounds of breast cancer
and a small black-haired daughter
she has no intention of leaving;
this friend who declares in a fierce litany,

"If I have to walk through fire
again and again, I will live.
I will live to be 101."

And finally my father
who teaches me how to live
with our shared disease,
whose exhausted,
whispering voice still asks
and worries and loves.
Through 21 years of this wicked storm
battering down his home,
he still chooses us
over sleep and surrender.

I thank my guides.
shake my fist,
and refuse sleep
and surrender.

Leonore Gordon, 9/20/99