

Sweet and Sour:
Womanly Thoughts

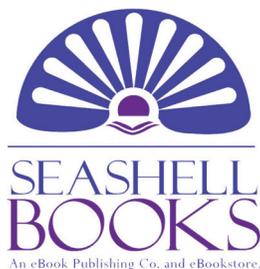
KJ Hannah Greenberg
With Rivka Gross

Sweet and Sour: Womanly Thoughts
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Note to Readers:

It is understood that this book does not constitute medical advice. Please seek professional care as is prudent for any situation similar to those described therein.

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Sweet and Sour: Womanly Thoughts

Preface:

In seventy literary bites, *Sweet and Sour: Womanly Thoughts* invites readers to explore the complex roles of females. This book celebrates moms' ability to simultaneously: mop carpets, diaper doll bottoms, chop beans, and actualize professional jobs. As well, this book regards, jadedly, some of the conventions surrounding womenfolk's socially prescribed limits.

This assemblage *is* meant to be provocative. It *is* a collection of frankly noisy notions at the same time as it *is* a rationale for ordering more chips and dips, for triaging one's inflatable swimming pools, and for weighing the utility of *papier-mâché* parrots. *Sweet and Sour: Womanly Thoughts* makes readers scold their supervisors while simultaneously wishing to be elsewhere, hugging their children. It is a peppery itch without the relief of a rub. Above all, this assemblage is an invitation to engage in critical thinking.

Sweet and Sour: Womanly Thoughts intentionally stomps around uncomfortable topics, dares to engage, to enrage, and to otherwise trigger emotions. For instance, this work describes The Middle East's history of disputed real estate with the same nonchalance with which it refers to the availability of affordable, herbal galactagogues. What's more, *Sweet and Sour: Womanly Thoughts* as readily bemoans excessive teen energies as it does adults' overreliance on electronic devices. Basically, this book does not shy away from prickly positions nor does it recoil from edifying ones. *Sweet and Sour: Womanly Thoughts* shovels collective cow dung into double dug rows for the express purpose of agitating, viz., for the express purpose of catalyzing new questions.

KJ Hannah Greenberg
Jerusalem, 2021

Introduction: Growth Plain and Fancy

I'll miss those not-too-little heads. Like most parents, I take pleasure in watching my kids grow, and, at the same time, I am in no rush to end my child-rearing project.

That is, I'm in no hurry to accelerate my offspring's physical, mental, or emotional development. Sure, I look forward to having grandchildren scooting around in diapers. Yet, I'm sure that it was only last week when my own brood was unable to explore anything except, literally, the toilet.

It was either an entire lifetime ago, or just five minutes before this present moment that those children-who-now-exist-as-teens woke, sometimes hourly, to nurse. Perhaps it was a dream from centuries earlier that I gagged at the smell of certain ethnic foods along with having: an insatiable craving for anchovies, a need to sleep in public vestibules (rather than walk *all the way* across campus to return to my office), and a frequent visitor's card to all my university's bathrooms.

I'm convinced that my older son used to clutch my knees. Nonetheless, today, he towers over me. My older daughter used to check, at least every five minutes, to make sure that I was paying attention to her. Today, she emails me, or, maybe, if we're both home, calls me on her cellphone. My younger daughter used to fit her head, neck, and shoulders into the crook between my chest and my chin. Today, she "steals" as much of my wardrobe as she can carry in her hands. As for my baby, these days, that last of my fruit remains disinterested in giving up cuddling. He still wakes up when he hears me tapping on my keyboard in an office across the house from his bedroom, and still grasps more about clipart, Internet access, and using our blender, than I can ever hope to know.

Sometimes, my teen daughters nod to each other, in not-so-silent agreement, that Mom, being middle-aged, could not possibly "understand" any of the ramifications of social nuance that they are discussing. I suppose that

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they forget that I shepherded thousands of college kids, in communication classes, at several universities, long before they were born. Yet, according to my female spawn, my comprehension of teenage discourse is rated somewhere between “bad” and “hopeless-but-we-won’t-tell-her-so-as-to-spare-her-feelings-and-her-sense-of-professional-accomplishment.”

Other times, my teenage son, gently, but firmly, “explains” to me the degree of error in my world concept. He suggests, politely, that his advice is more sagacious than my cleverness and then he encourages me to measure my life’s experiences via his yardsticks. Meanwhile, his younger brother, who, fortunately, is still all boy, takes it upon himself to advise me on how to clean candlesticks, use cellphones, and make pureed fruit drinks. Like my older son, my younger one insinuates, ever so sweetly, that if only I’d pay attention, all would be well.

Are my teens wise beyond my years? Not likely. Do they have views to which I’m oblivious? Most definitely! Would I trade in or otherwise hurry through this part of our shared lives? Not for a million wishes.

Babies and Children's Assurances

Verbal Snapshots

I wish I had taken more snapshots of my kids when they were in diapers, in training pants, and in preschool. I wish I had more frequently captured their drooling faces, their sing-song awe of creation, and the manifestations of that drooling awe which was constituted by their collections of dead animal parts, mud, twigs, and leaves, all of which got stuffed under our sofa cushions. I wish, as well, I had believed that that physically wearisome span of parenting would pass quickly, but I had “known too much” to abide by the wisdoms of more veteran mothers.

Sure, I made some notes, wrote some bits, and otherwise lamely exerted myself to gather evidence of my sons and daughters’ first years. True, to that assemblage, I managed to add, over time, mental memories. Yet, together, those witnessed and evoked evidence of my children’s early comings and goings constitute a blurry picture. There remain more untold revelations, more forgotten stories, more poignant events than the ones I safely shelved in my gourd. We lived, together, more minutes, more hours, more days, and more seasons than any mnemonic constructed of discarded sneakers, of outgrown yarmulkes, and of crumpled tatters of homework could ever recall.

For every trip to a farm, a playground, a museum, a beach, a wooded glen, a main street, or a vacant lot that I remember, there are ten comparable happenings that I’ve forgotten. For every sagacious expression out of my babes’ mouths that I can quote verbatim, there are dozens I’ve lost. For every kiss, hug, cuddle, or other instance of affection that is burned into my brain, there are hundreds that have floated away like so much milk thistle fluff.

Some of those missing incidents seem commonplace, such as the times when one kid went digging in our cats’ litter box, a second filled a cup with juice

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but kept on pouring, a third rearranged all my paired earrings per texture, and a fourth literally tossed his snack, piece by piece, out of our moving minivan's window. Other of those missing incidents seem particular to my brood, such as when one begged to buy boxes of "prettiful" stationary from a card store in order to save that establishment from foreclosure, such as when a second ran crying to me upon hearing a sheep baa, such as when a third used our finger paints to "dye" her outfit, and such as when a fourth fell asleep, with our entire afikoman, i.e., with our entire special, needed piece of Pesach Seder matzah, clutched in his chubby fist.

Whether pedestrian or exceptional, all the fragments of my children's youth are irreplaceable. Too many of those bits have been swapped for references to more recent goings-on given that my hard wiring, just like everyone else's, has limited storage space and that, within my mental archives, new events entirely overwrite older, more treasured files. I wish I had trusted the crones who had scolded that I was going to be able, for only a limited time, to enjoy the freshness and vitality of my body and the ostensibly infinite capacity of my mind.

I laughed when I had been told to write down my birth stories. How could a mother forget those dramas? I laughed when I had been told that I could not possibly take too many photos. How could I know that the combined effects of sunlight on the montages affixed to our walls, accidents that occurred during our international relocation, certain vital situations, during which we lacked film, and my personal process of aging would leave me with inadequate records?

I am a word person. As such, I supposed that I would always have mastery of my memories, if not in mental images, then captured linguistically. It's just that I hadn't accepted as true that the richness and complexity of life would overwhelm my ever-so-human ability to summon up and to behold. That is, I hadn't thought ahead to the time when my kids would tower over me and when I would feel the impact of growing older.

However, even if I could magic back more of our shared past, I'm not sure I would want to do so. There's small measure of utility in dredging up that