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Hold Back the Clock

It's not like I wasn't warned.

I had heard it many times, from a myriad of people. I just never believed it. I certainly never experienced it. In fact, in my house the exact opposite seemed to be true.

"Oh, they grow up so fast," they all said. Really?

I couldn't relate to that now it's sunrise/now it's sunset feeling; the days never went swiftly around here. In fact, they were long, drawn out, and headache-inducing, like a two-year-old's tantrum. Or a stalled labor. Or a three-day Yom Tov with sick children.

I was in agreement with my outspoken Israeli friend, Orly. She was once outside with her kids when a neighbor walked by and innocently commented, "Oh, they're getting so big. It goes by so fast." To which Orly retorted, "That's because you're not the one changing their diapers every day!"

But even Orly deserted me. A few years later, she reneged on her prior assessment as to the speed of child development and maturation. "I was wrong Simi; it really does go so fast." Humph. Not for me, pal. My days still felt as though I was walking through water. I was expending so much energy, yet moving so slowly.

All that changed last week. Which was when my eighth-grade son was accepted to *mesivta*. The place was everything we were looking for in a yeshivah: talented *rebbeim*; individualized attention; a strong *chevra*; a wholesome environment; a *rosh yeshivah* who unflinchingly takes responsibility for the boys' development as *bnei Torah*.

There's just one hitch. The boys dorm at the yeshivah. So while my son is greatly looking forward to his one-minute commute from bed to *beis medrash*, I feel like I've been punched in the stomach. Hourly.

In a moment, my perspective has shifted dramatically. Wasn't it just yesterday that his arrival in the world turned this couple into a family? I can still feel his long blond curls before his hair was cut. I can remember sending him off to cheder, where he was enveloped in the warmth of Rebbi Gamliel.

Wasn't he just that four-year-old boy who was mesmerized by the automatic doors in the drugstore when we moved to America? His fourth-grade rendition of the Shulchan, created with such painstaking detail for the Mishkan Fair, his bar mitzvah *p'shetel*, which he practiced so many times his little sister knew the beginning by heart. Dozens of snapshots flooded my mind and heart.

Now this mini-man is poised on the brink of adulthood and has no compunction whatsoever about taking leave of his mother. Two minutes ago he was ripping books off the bookshelf, and now he's a *lamdan*-in-training who fearlessly rides his bike to school through city streets and doesn't let me hug him anymore. How did this happen?

While I have yet to figure out how to turn back that proverbial clock so that I can savor the memories just a little bit longer, there is one bright spot to all of this. He does have six younger siblings. Lucky for them, and lucky for me, I'm learning to savor every day we share. ■