

Robnel WINDOW

It measures five feet tall by eight feet wide. It's a bay window with clear, unobstructed, double paned glass. From the kitchen table the view of the street is confined to these forty square feet. The house sits on a small rise, beneficently looking down on the street. The front porch protects the window from the rain. In the early morning of Spring and Summer, the bright sun shines into the kitchen and is blinding to the person sitting to one side of the round table. Gwilym, one of our beagles, leaves nose prints about eighteen inches high from his perch on the window seat. He is the primary watcher, sleeping or pretending to. Only his eyes betray his surveillance of the scene beyond the window.

I call this the Welcome Window. Energetic walkers, little Asian women, and dog-walkers pass by. They are surprised to see us sitting at the table, looking at them as we make a sort of eye contact. The passers-by usually look away quickly as if they've intruded. We are often tempted to wave a greeting to them. When a friend goes by and sees us, she usually smiles and waves to us. This is my friendly window. It says that it's all right to look into our home. We aren't afraid.

I'd invite you to join me at the table but that would be non-productive. The sights from my perch at the table are always a surprise. For seconds at a time, people pass by, trucks and school buses rumble by. Sometimes cars stop in front of our corner house. The occupants are either looking at maps, making phone calls, or coming up to our door seeking help for their troubled cars. Moving slowly is our beagles' nemeses, the two neighborhood cats. They saunter toward our house secure in the knowledge that these canines can't get to them. With a cat toss of the head they veer off to the private drive on the side of the house and disappear from sight. This short journey is accompanied by the frenetic barking of the beagles. The squirrels, whose permanent quarters are our back yard, stay busy running back and forth between our house and the one across the street. A flicking flag of a tail swiftly runs onto the front porch, then slips under. It's nice to know that the cats have not destroyed every chipmunk in the area. The rabbits living in a copse behind the house across the street, are cautious, venturing out onto the front lawn, sometimes sitting on the driveway surveying the scene. They stay across the street. These are wise bunnies. If you looked away for a moment, the rabbit will have disappeared. A groundhog appears at the top of the lawn. The furry, hunched over,

munching figure stays a short time and disappears as quickly as he appeared.

It's a few weeks from Summer. We think that the rains have finally stopped. My husband has risen early. I finally arrive at the kitchen table to hear him report that there's a red bird sitting on the driveway across the street. The bird has been going from one tall tree to a pine tree nearby. "He's a cardinal", I tell him and as we watch he's joined by a female cardinal who duplicates his back and forth actions. "It's a nest in the tree to the right". I tell him. Their babies must have arrived.

Our backyard habitat, very bird friendly, has a bird population that is very active. The front lawn is great for grackles picking at the grass. Maybe it's sod webworms. A feisty mocking bird is chasing a crow up our driveway. Sparrows are flitting through the dwarf Albertas at the entrance to our house. They make a pass through the porch to check on insect population around the porch light or on the porch ceiling. Occasionally, we sight a bright yellow goldfinch passing by quickly. They tend to not hang around.

I consider the location of our corner home not conducive to children playing ball, rollerblading, or any activity played in the street. Cars come whizzing by as they turn from the side street. Sometimes we can hear a car speeding up the side street. We wait to see whether he makes the turn without colliding with an oncoming car. Of course, we've heard the crunch of an accident out there.

There are no empty lots here so the children try to do what we did when we were young a long time ago. They declare a play area and go to it. This particular day, after watching the cardinals, a boy of about eight years appeared in our sights. He wore a team shirt with his name on it and held a large baseball mitt on his left hand. His pants were droopy to below his knees. Someone out of sight was throwing grounders to him. He correctly went down on one knee to catch the ball. He mostly missed and was forced to hustle to get the ball before it went down the storm sewer at the end of the street. So he'd run by, go out of our sight, then reappear with the ball and throw it back to the invisible person. This happened several times. One high bouncer hit him in his private parts. He fell to the ground, went into a fetal position and rocked back and forth. I looked at my husband questioning what we should do just as he stood up. The boy made some physical adjustments and was ready for the next ball. It was a high fly. Up

went his gloved hand, the ball fell into it, he lowered his hand, the ball rolled away. His reaction time was slow. He thought he had caught it. Off went the ball. He ran, out of line of sight. We waited. The next vision was a slow moving, hunched over, head lowered, little boy with hands at his sides. No ball. He walked out of our line of vision. We haven't seen him since that day.