

# Friends of Silence

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"Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?"



Dear Friends ~ The shaded spot along the creek where water pools between rock slabs revives us in the thick of muggy July. The kids quickly toss their shoes aside; The eleven-year-old picks her way across the stream to check on crayfish who lurk beneath the tiny cascades, and her younger brother returns to his dam-in-progress. They no longer require a steadying hand on the slick rocks or engineering advice like in past summers, so I perch on a nearby boulder with a novel instead.

"Do you think a dinosaur ever drank this water?" my son mused on a recent visit to the creek.

His big sister (our budding geologist) piped in, "Actually, the Appalachian Mountains are older than any dinosaurs. They formed before Pangea even broke apart, which means they're even older than the Atlantic Ocean!"

We all paused to fathom something so ancient (480 million years, according to the biologist Alex Petrovnia—100 million years before land animals). How utterly strange, I reflect inwardly, to rest on a boulder that possibly predates mammals while wondering how many more summers my growing kids will make this trip to the creek with me. Strange to watch water that once lapped the shores of a supercontinent run between their toes. (Those toes went up two shoe sizes in less than a year, by the way.)

Time is marked by such contradictions: It moves swiftly *and* slowly. It is both vast *and* immediate. In that tension is an invitation to drop what the poet Ted Loder calls "anxious scurrying"—to remain as watchful as a prehistoric boulder by the creek and as enthusiastically present as a child hunting crayfish in a murky pool. ~ Joy



I can hear the sizzle of newborn stars, and know anything of meaning, of the fierce magic emerging here. I am witness to flexible eternity, the evolving past, and I know we will live forever, as dust or breath in the face of stars, in the shifting pattern of winds.

~ Joy Harjo in *SECRETS FROM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD (VOLUME 17)*

This morning a splendid dawn passed over our house on its way to Kansas. This morning Kansas rolled out of its sleep into a sunlight grandly announced, proclaimed throughout heaven, one more of the very finite number of days that this old prairie has been called Kansas, or Iowa. But it has all been one day, that first day. Light is constant, we just turn over in it. So every day is in fact the selfsame evening and morning.

~ Marilynne Robinson in *GILEAD*

Time as objective reality has never made much sense to me. It's what happens that matters. How can minutes and years, devices of our own creation, mean the same thing to gnats and to cedars? Two hundred years is young for the trees whose tops this morning are hung with mist. It's an eyeblink of time for the river and nothing at all for the rocks...

If there is meaning in the past and in the imagined future, it is captured in the moment. When you have all the time in the world, you can spend it, not on going somewhere, but on being where you are. So I stretch out, close my eyes, and listen to the rain.

~ Robin Wall Kimmerer in *BRAIDING SWEETGRASS*

**Like a wide wake, rippling  
Infinitely into the distance, everything**

**That ever was still is, somewhere..**

~ Tracy K. Smith from "Everything That Ever Was"  
in *LIFE ON MARS*



We are thrilled to unveil our newly built website, launching in July! You can still find us at the same url: [friendsofsilence.net](http://friendsofsilence.net). Thank you for your patience as this work-in-progress comes together.

**We age while we hope.**

~ Padraig O'Tuama

**When we are young, the words are scattered  
all around us. As they are assembled by  
experience, so also are we, sentence by  
sentence, until the story takes shape.**

~ Louise Erdrich in *THE PLAGUE OF DOVES*



I want to be born again, in exactly the selfsame life,  
aware this time from the inside out, and to stand this time  
as a beautiful un-worrying witness, living beyond  
the need for this or that...

~ David Whyte from "Born Again" in

*RIVER FLOW: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS*

### **The secret heart of time is change and growth.**

~ John O'Donohue

Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke in

*LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET*

There is a story of a woman running away from tigers. She runs and runs and the tigers are getting closer and closer. When she comes to the edge of a cliff, she sees some vines there, so she climbs down and holds on to the vines. Looking down, she sees that there are tigers below her as well. She then notices that a mouse is gnawing away at the vine to which she is clinging. She also sees a beautiful little bunch of strawberries close to her, growing out of a clump of grass. She looks up and she looks down. She looks at the mouse. Then she just takes a strawberry, puts it in her mouth, and enjoys it thoroughly. Tigers above, tigers below. This is actually the predicament that we are always in, in terms of our birth and death. Each moment is just what it is. It might be the only moment of our life; it might be the only strawberry we'll ever eat. We could get depressed about it, or we could finally appreciate it and delight in the preciousness of every single moment of our life.

~ Pema Chödrön in *THE WISDOM OF NO ESCAPE: HOW TO LOVE YOURSELF AND YOUR WORLD*

**When I was a young man,  
grown up at last, how large  
I seemed to myself! I was a tree,  
tall already, and what I had not  
yet reached, I would yet grow  
to reach. Now, thirty more years  
added on, I have reached much  
I did not expect, in a direction  
unexpected. I am growing downward,  
smaller, one among the grasses.**

~ Wendell Berry, "Thirty More Years" in *ENTRIES*

It is looking at things for a long time that ripens you and gives you a deeper meaning.

~ Vincent Van Gogh

**Help us to live in the eternal moment,  
awaiting your perfect timing  
in all things.**

~ Nan Merrill from her interpretation of Psalm 105  
in *PSALMS FOR PRAYING*

Wake up, my soul.  
I don't know where you are,  
where you're hiding,  
but wake up, please,  
we're still together,  
the road is still before us,  
a bright strip of dawn  
will be our star.

~ Adam Zagajewski,  
"Wake Up" in *ASYMMETRY*



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You work with what you are given —

today I am blessed, today I am given luck.

It takes the shape of a dozen ripening fruit trees,  
a curtain of pole beans, a thicket of berries.

It takes the shape of a dozen empty hours.

In them is neither love nor love's muster of losses,  
in them there is no chance for harm or for good.

Does even my humanness matter?

A bear would be equally happy, this August day,  
fat on the simple sweetness plucked between thorns.

There are some who may think, "How pitiful, how lonely."

Other must murmur, "How lazy."

I agree with them all: pitiful, lonely, lazy.

Lost to the earth and to heaven,

thoroughly drunk on its whiskeys, I wander my kingdom.

~ Jane Hirshfield, "August Day" in

*GIVEN SUGAR, GIVEN SALT: 1951-1967*