

# Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”



Joy Houck Bauer

Dear Friends ~ We are walking our daily forested loop, my dog and I, this softly gray afternoon. We crunch through the colorful patchwork blanket of autumn foliage so recently laid down. The leaves obscure our well-worn footpaths each November, so I'm bushwacking my best approximation of a trail, checking for familiar markers to keep me from wandering off the route I usually traipse without a second thought. I find myself smiling—at the playful leaf riot kicking up with each step—and at the unexpected thrill of entering a well-known space with fresh eyes and curiosity.

Much like the forest floor, often our inner landscapes are marked by habitual patterns of thinking and emotional rumination that we tend to follow because...well...that's the way we've always gone. Sometimes what we really need is a crisp November gale to shake loose old habits and map out new possibilities for the journey.

Back on the trail, my dog (he's called Gary) stops with his broom of tail pointed and a single golden paw lifted in anticipation. Then he's off: weaving in the underbrush and bouncing over the stream. Gary's a furry little trailblazer, and for the moment I am his student. I trundle off behind him, eager for the unexpected contours and unforeseen turns that lie uncharted ahead. ~ Joy



**Let new words leap out of our mouths.  
Let our hands be astonished at what we have made, and glad.  
Let us follow ourselves into a present not ruled by the past.  
If we jump up now, our far will be near.**

~ Minnie Bruce Pratt, "If we jump up" in *INSIDE THE MONEY MACHINE*

The hardest ground to plow was living fully without worry, not in the past gone on or future yet to come—but in the present hardpan now.

~ J. Drew Lanham in *SPARROW ENVY*

Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for through You will I know wholeness; I shall reflect your light both day and night... With your steadfast love, once again, companion me along your way.

~ Nan Merrill, from her interpretation of "Psalm 25" in *PSALMS FOR PRAYING*

**My eyes were in my feet.**

~ Nan Shepherd in *THE LIVING MOUNTAIN*



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**By night we hasten in darkness  
to search for living water,  
only our thirst leads us onward,  
only our thirst leads us onward.**

~ from "De noche iremos" Taize song

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time.

~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in *HEARTS ON FIRE*

From trains to automobiles to airplanes, each time the speed of connection quickens, travelers have expressed a sense of growing alienation from the land blurring past our windows... a faster connection palpably diminishes our ability to experience the richness of the physical world: A person texting her friends or riding on a bullet train is connected very quickly to her ends, but in doing so, she skips over the immensely complex terrain that lies between those two points... the faster we travel, the more intensely we feel our lack of relationship with the land we traverse.

~ Robert Moor in *ON TRAILS: AN EXPLORATION*

Do you have hope for the future?  
 someone asked Robert Frost, toward the end.  
 Yes, and even for the past, he replied,  
 that it will turn out to have been all right  
 for what it was, something we can accept,  
 mistakes made by the selves we had to be,  
 not able to be, perhaps, what we wished,  
 or what looking back half the time it seems  
 we could so easily have been, or ought...  
 The future, yes, and even for the past,  
 that it will become something we can bear.  
 ...Hope for the past,  
 yes, old Frost, your words provide that  
 courage,  
 and it brings strange peace that itself passes  
 into past, easier to bear because  
 you said it, rather casually, as snow  
 went on falling in Vermont years ago.

~ David Ray from "Thanks Robert Frost"  
 in *MUSIC OF TIME*



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At the end there may be no answers  
 and only a few very simple questions:  
 did I love,  
 finish my task in the world?  
 Learn at least one  
 of the many names of God?  
 At the intersections,  
 the boundaries where one life began  
 and another  
 ended, the jumping-off places  
 between fear and  
 possibility, at the ragged edges of pain,  
 did I catch the  
 smallest glimpse of the holy?

~ Jeanne Lohmann from "Praise What Comes"  
 in *THE LIGHT OF INVISIBLE BODIES*

**The first thing**

**The last thing.**

**Start from where you are.**

~ Dale Pendell from *LIFE PRAYERS*



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**The path is made  
 in the walking of it.**

~ Zhuangzi

It's a journey . . . that I propose . . . I am not the guide . . . nor technical assistant . . .

I will be your fellow passenger . . .

Though the rail has been ridden . . . winter clouds cover . . . autumn's exuberant quilt . . .

we must provide our own guide-posts . . .

I have heard . . . from previous visitors . . . the road washes out sometimes . . .

and passengers are compelled . . . to continue groping . . . or turn back . . . I am not afraid . . .

I am not afraid . . . of rough spots . . . or lonely times . . .

I don't fear . . . the success of this endeavor . . .

I promise you nothing . . . I accept your promise . . . of the same we are simply riding . . . a wave . . .

that may carry . . . or crash . . .

It's a journey . . . and I want . . . to go . . .

~ Nikki Giovanni from "A Journey" in *THE COLLECTED POETRY OF NIKKI GIOVANNI: 1968-1998*