

The Noise That Sustains: The Sounds of Life Outside

Listening to the children outside growing up delighted me —whether in the pool, or around the fire pit as the day came to a close. Each stage presented sounds unique to that age: Squeals when they were young, to laughter with friends when they became teens.

The intense sound of my son practicing the drums in the garage while I made dinner inside . . . made me smile with each crescendo.

The joy I felt in the quiet mornings with only the pool's waterfalls flowing — often giving way to the impromptu party of neighbors chatting on the deck.

All the sounds of living; the noise that life makes.

After moving from our family home in the suburbs to life in the rush of the city . . . outside noise continues to let me know I'm a part of humanity. Even with the occasional helicopter whirling above, or a distant siren streaking by.

We have a garden apartment. The floor-to-ceiling windows in the living room give way to a large 15 by 20 foot patio — truly bringing the outside in.

Large potted plants decorate the patio. Smaller, colorful ones, are lined up along the 6' wall surrounding our open space. There's comfortable seating, a dolphin fountain, and a long, heavy glass table surrounded by Mexican chairs, providing a wonderful spot for meals with family and friends.

We really never notice that we're supporting the structure above us: 19 floors that are defined by a series of symmetric balconies and windows stretching up across the massive building.

Beyond the patio —large trees reside the land between our unit and the street. A private jungle separating us and the four lane road beyond.

With the sliding doors open, I hear the scattered sounds of life's activity. The morning crows vying for dominance in the tree tops far above . . .the muted sounds of the city awaking . . . and the soft rhythmic sound of the late afternoon traffic as it saunters by on the street.

At other times, one hears only the confident tinkling sound of the fountain on our patio — no longer accompanied by the gentle orchestra of city noise.

However, inside our home, until doors and windows are opened, no outside activity can be heard.

One early morning, as the sun streaked through our bedroom window, I was on my laptop with a sleeping cat snuggled next to me on the bed.

A blunt thump - or thud — was heard by both of us. We look at each other ... then, hearing nothing else ... we both return to our previous activities. The moment was forgotten. The distant noises of life in the city.

About a hour later, I'm dressed and ready to tackle the day. I head out to the living room ... a fresh cup of coffee from the kitchen is calling me.

Easily looking beyond the patio I see fire trucks and the recognizable blue uniforms of police officers ... and a yellow tape cordoning off a large swath of land. The end of the tape is connected to the back side of our patio wall, the one nearest our long glass table.

I grab a Mexican chair and stand on it to ask questions of the nearby officer. But before I can say anything, he moves close to the wall and addresses me:

“Did you hear anything earlier morning?” he inquires.

“Yes, but it was only a soft thud.”

“Did you see anything?”

“No ... what happened?”

“An older man, very ill I understand, quietly climbed over his balcony, and jumped from the 17th floor. He landed in the dirt,” — the officer continues, pointing a spot just outside our wall — “A few more inches and he would have been in your patio.”

“You mean about here?” ... I respond, pointing to our heavy glass table.

We just look at each other.

I said a silent prayer for a soul who felt this life was too much to cope with any longer.

He ended it quickly ... the thud was almost silent. But now I will forever recognize it as the sound of something being unmistakably stopped by the earth.

A new noise has been added to my cornucopia of sounds representing the activities of life

— but this one is the sound of life's cycle ... ending.