

Comfortably Quiet

Silence is something very special. Have you ever stopped and listen to silence? The quiet enters you so deeply that all of one's body can feel it.

Recently, I felt the calm and tranquil sensation of quiet. Running the back roads of Bedford I arrived behind Clarke's Farm and the neighboring St. Anselm College athletic fields. This December day was an experience of bright, shining sun as each footstep landed, cushioned on the cold, green grass. I was several miles from home and my breathing was without labor and refreshing. I circled the outer perimeter of the soccer and then the football fields. At the back of the gridiron, I followed a path through a gap in a moss and leaf covered stonewall. This ancient stone fence dividing the sporting fields from the forest. Into the woods I set off.

Pine needles, roots and rocks cover the winding trail through Spruce, Birches, Oaks and Maples. The Laurentian quality of these woods is very comforting. I move quietly. My eyes take in the movement of a squirrel, the brightness of a birch and I navigate each step safely onto the ground. This is tranquil motion. Sweat drips down my forehead.

The rolling forest footpath presents turns and switchbacks, another turn and a hurdle over a fallen rotting tree. I circle through the wooded area, up a short, steep incline and escape the woods into another open field. I pause standing on the high point of this expanse. I accept the stillness of this landscape. This is not an athletic field but an uneven rectangle plot of land most likely farmland from years ago. I step forward and wonder if I will see wildlife such as deer, or startle a grouse from the tall golden hay grasses.

Slowly I set in motion around the perimeter, each step landing comfortably on the sometimes hard and sometimes soft mud, clover and straw field. Down the backside I run with the St. A's church steeple peering above the surrounding trees. An intersecting footpath cuts diagonally back across the rectangle, but I opt out of this shortcut and continue on. My breath is rhythmic and at ease coming up the other side of this natural track. Circling around the entire distance I return near the place where I earlier exited the woods. Another trail invites me back into the forest, I accept.

The winding trail leads me to envision collegiate harriers with lungs heaving and muscles straining at the challenge of competitors and nature. This dynamic mental image is lost as the quiet of my movements continue forward on woodland granite stones, roots and twigs. I am back to the football field.

No noise. Usually filled with the cheers of the crowd, the grunts of players and the shouting of coaches, but today St. Anselm's field, surrounded by forest are quiet, and it feels right.

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I stop my run and slowly walk the outer periphery. I glance left and right, thankful for this moment. The brilliant and radiant sun, blue sky, and the occasional call of birds not visible tell me to stop. Standing still, I close my eyes towards a horizon overlooking the distant city. I listen to the quiet. All of my body feels the stillness of this vista. I hear nothing and feel everything. The sun glows and warms my sweat-covered face. My feet are solidly planted on the grass. The world circles around me, embracing me. I feel as if I could root and grow into a tree. My arms ever so gradually rise, higher and higher until I am reaching for the sky. I touch the blue. The tranquility comforts me. I know where I am, but I do not feel I am there I am comfortably quiet.

Arms and hands return to my sides, eyes slowly open, the scene feels different, as if I am seeing this place after being away for a long time. I was lost and I found. I begin to walk, look around and then begin my run once again along a seldom-used dirt road, past the soccer fields, a few houses and onto the country road that brought me here.