



There is a gravel path between the house where I live and work and the greenhouse. Once I briskly walked the distance, about a city block. Now I must go more slowly.

Along the path I have planted a number of things including six Birch trees. This time of year the white bark on the lower trunks shine forth and the yellow and green leaves on the branches dance with increasing fervor in the autumn winds. Poets have often reflected upon those dancing branches. Robert Frost (1874–1963) saw young girls on their hands and knees tossing their hair over their head to dry in the sun. I never saw girls drying their hair in the

sun, but I will take his word for it and it is a delightful image. What I see in my own imagination more resembles the practice session of a ballet, where the serious and the comic combine — which is more or less my general outlook on this autumn season.

Try as we may to have only delightful thoughts on these beautiful days there is always a touch of melancholy. Five of the birch trees along the path have grown beautifully and are a joy to behold for me. But one of the trees has been stressed almost from the beginning and there is a real question if it will survive the winter. It has very small leaves which droop while those on the other trees dance. I am probably a little more mindful of the struggling tree than of the other five. I believe that was what Basho was expressing in the haiku at the top of this reflection. The poem was written during his final illness.

Deep into these pleasant days it does seem natural to wonder how our neighbors fare. As I sit on the Chapel deck looking out over the colorful and refreshing landscape, I can feel neighbors beside me. An unemployed young mother with a sick baby and no insurance. A friend with a terminal illness concerned about his troubled teenage granddaughter. And people I have never met but heard about. Another teenager in a Jordanian refugee camp being married off to a much older man because her family cannot feed her. An African father with no hope of feeding any of his children after a civil uprising. A woman I knew as a child wrestling with mental illness and wandering threatening streets. And so it goes in my thoughts, and I am sure in yours.

Basho's question is an important one. It is a recognition that life is really not "all about me."

I'm pretty sure that there is not much I can do, except hope, that the struggling birch tree will make it through the winter. But somehow I know that I cannot enjoy the birches I have planted without including all of them.

Brother Toby