

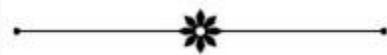
I come into the  
peace of wild things.

*Wendell Berry (1934- )*



## OUR LITTLE NEIGHBORS

There is more to the unfolding of our age than what goes on in the White House. I just talked to someone who came from a meeting concerning the treatment of children at our borders. He was in tears. I don't blame him. Mean-spiritedness and lack of compassion permeate the air. But it is important not to let it poison us, because there is much more going on around us to be mindful about.



The inspiration for this Reflection started in the chapel in the middle of our Sunday meeting. Holly saw a spider racing toward someone's foot just before we were all going to stand up. Sensing the danger, she ran to the spider with a

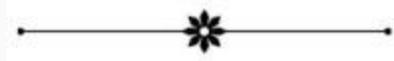
piece of paper. The spider was startled. He or she got onto the paper, then gracefully floated down to where it was even closer to someone's foot. Lance ran out with another piece of paper. Between Lance and Holly they managed to keep the spider on one or another sheet of paper until they could deposit him or her outdoors in an area that Lance deemed safe.



I had frankly forgotten what spiritual matter we had been discussing. My thoughts were on the spider and how it was cared for. I remembered a haiku of Issa (1763–1828) translated by our very good friend Cliff Edwards, Professor of Spiritual Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. I am mostly using Cliff's rendering of haiku in this Reflection. Why? Because it is better than mine! But, I will slip in a few from our Sister Marti and me. In my experience, haiku occasionally takes us deeper than prose, so I will just use some to add a little spice to what I write here.

Back to the spider,

*Spiders in corners —  
You needn't worry at all  
I'll not sweep you down*



There are a lot of birds around. This is an important time for our avian neighbors to teach their offspring independence. I saw some swallow youth clinging to the edge of the house gutter. Their parents were flying right in front of them turning somersaults, and, I presume, demonstrating how wonderful it was to take to the air. They will learn very quickly and a day will come in the early autumn when all the swallows will make a grand circle in the sky and fly back to their winter home in South America.

In the morning, the songs of the birds seem to harmonize in a beautiful

response to the dawn. There is a Buddhist morning prayer that dedicates everything a person does that day for the benefit of all beings, without exception. Perhaps in their own way, this is what the birds do each morning.

*Me and the mountain —  
a cuckoo singing to us  
each in his own turn.*



We have a lot of ravens. I'm not too fond of ravens and their “caw” is not the most pleasant bird sound. Nonetheless, they are mightily admired by some of the young people who come here. They quite regularly hand me notes saying things like *The Raven is the keeper of secrets* or *If a Raven has flown into your life then magic and healing abound*. I will confess to being moved by this note:

*To me, the Raven is a member and symbol of Starcross. For what the creature itself represents encompasses all the gifts and lessons people, myself included, have experienced and gained at Starcross. You have changed my life immensely, and I hope this will be a reminder of the healing, wisdom and magic you have, bestow, and hold inside you — just like the Raven!*

OK, bring on the Ravens!



My cat Tigger is not a pet, he is one of my best friends. Although I admit my view is not shared by everyone! Tigger and Sister Marti were very close. Whenever he had some hurt or ailment, he would go to her room. Once she wrote,

*Safe inside the house  
looking through the open door  
the cat checks the world.*

When Marti became ill with pancreatic cancer, Tigger seldom left her room. After she died he would often visit her room, perhaps sensing something of her, maybe waiting for her return. Once I wrote,

*The cat sits waiting  
for someone who will not come —  
and I sit with him.*



I don't know of any haiku that Issa wrote about lizards, but he did write one about a grasshopper in his final days.

*Ask the grasshopper  
to be keeper of my grave  
after I have gone.*



In Asia they often have impressive lions or dragons guarding sacred places like tombs or temples. Our little chapel seems to be guarded by lizards. They are only a few inches long, and they seem to really love the environment around the chapel. I don't know where they go in the winter. But in the spring, they appear. We

watch them grow and explore the earth until late autumn. They live a peaceful life, if they are careful to avoid falling asleep when large birds are flying around.

I would like to stop here with the magnificent haiku that is rendered beautifully by Cliff.

*A bug on a branch  
swept away down the river*

*still singing his song.*

The river we are on may be rough, crude, and cruel. We may have to struggle to stay afloat on our little branch. But we should never forget that our primary task and obligation as human beings is to keep singing our song.

***Brother Toby***