

Friends of Silence

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December 2025

"Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?"

Dear Friends ~ It has been fifteen years since that winter day in Vermont, in a small house on Skunk Hollow Road, when Nan Merrill placed a colorful bundle of Friends of Silence newsletters into my hands. The air outside was cold and hushed, but inside, something radiant was stirring.

"Here's my baby," she said.

In that moment, a current passed between us—silent, sure, unmistakable. It was as if something leapt from her heart into mine, not words or instructions, but a living transmission. My body trembled; my eyes filled. Later, when I found the courage to ask if she knew what had happened, Nan smiled gently. "Of course I do," she whispered. "I sent it."

She was not simply handing over a file or a task. She was entrusting a spirit—her dream of a gathered community listening for the voice of Silence in a noisy world. She wanted to know if we could hold it with tenderness, if we could let it grow without her.

Nan died the following year, but the flame she passed on has never gone out. It found new life here at Rolling Ridge, among the hills and forests that breathe the same stillness she loved. Over these fifteen years, her dream has rooted itself in many hands and hearts—Anne, Bella, Trish, Linda, Lindsay, Mary Ann, Kate, Joy, Katie, Todd, Bob, Billy and so many others who have carried forward her invitation to live as friends of Silence.

Silence, Nan used to say, is not always our friend. She can be demanding, unpredictable, fierce. She draws us through surrender, through the ache of letting go, until all that remains is what is real and true. To stretch out one's hand toward Silence is to consent to be changed.

And yet, how could we wish it otherwise? These fifteen years have been a pilgrimage—of listening more deeply, of learning to trust the slow work of love, of holding this fragile and luminous "baby" as it grows in its own mysterious way.

When I think back to that day in Vermont, I realize now that Nan didn't just entrust her work to me. She entrusted it to all of us—to everyone who reads these words, who pauses each month to enter the quiet, who lets Silence do her transformative work within.

So today, as we mark fifteen years of tending Nan's flame, we give thanks for her life, for her vision, and for the living Silence that continues to call us onward.

May we keep listening. May we keep walking. May we keep the flame alive.

~ Bob

*Look to the light, burn candles for peace, huddle with loved ones,
yes, even strangers, and persevere, dear friends.
~ Mary Ann, from June 2022 (Vol. XXXV, No. 6)*

In this part of the world, frost crusts at the edges of minute leaves and blades of grass. The chill air illuminates each breath, making us mindful once again how crucial warmth is to sustaining life. Whether sitting in a rocker by the crackling fire of a homey hearth or huddling over a trash can fire under the freeway to fend off the cold bite of homelessness, we gather round fires because we crave the heat and light they generate. In this moment of history when so much of the world has become harsh and bitter cold, people cry out for a rekindling of the fires of love and compassion. We need to build heart hearths—havens of warmth and light where we can look across the sparks and flames to see the same longings in each others' eyes.

~ Linda, from December 2015 (Vol. XXVIII, No. 11)

In the words of Michael Meade, sometimes I dream that we at Friends of Silence are "a small band of servants and fools who wend their way into moments and places with a carpetbag of stories, songs, poems, dances, melodies, snippets of wisdom, and spools of connective thread. With these, we seek to weave containers in which genius sparks can ignite the lantern of soul in every person there."

~ Bob Sabbath from February 2023 (Vol. XXXVI, No. 2)



*Light dwells deep within each of us
ready to radiate forth
as our will freely surrenders
in alignment with our soul's purpose.
We are here on Earth to lift and deepen
our own awareness and that of creation:
co-partners in the Divine Plan
for the divinization of all creation.
Seek within and find the Source
of Love and Light.
Shine in unity with all whose joy
is to co-birth as a light
in the world.*

~ Nan Merrill in LUMEN CHRISTI... HOLY WISDOM

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When Bob brought the ministry of the Friends of Silence Letter to his home in a wild and sacred patch of forest in the foothills of the Blue Ridge, I “met” Nan. I learned of her faith and courage when in the midst of a city in turmoil and pain (1987 Detroit) she called a contemplative community to welcome the healing power of Silence and pray for peace. The little group was open to all faiths and cultures. It grew from 40 members to thousands around the world linked in heart-prayer and by the Letter, which Nan sent monthly

to her “friends of Silence”. That Letter carried beauty, compassion, wisdom and love to all who held its two folded pages in their grateful hands.

Fifteen years ago, we promised to hold the tender heart of Friends of Silence. We understood that Nan’s hope for the life of her baby went beyond the Letter, and we endeavored to nurture Friends of Silence in the directions that seemed called, to allow the child to grow: a retreat ministry, a website with an archive and a searchable database of quotes, an electronic version of the Letter, and a Substack, each and every one a labor of love.

In this Advent season, when we remember the beautiful ancient story of a Holy birth, I ponder the baby that Nan entrusted to Bob. Just as humble and surprising, the Letter is a living being, filled with warmth and breath, crying out to the Divine Night, to the Mystery and the Silence, for all that we love. This is how I have come to understand that the Letter is alive like a fire is alive.

As the Northern Hemisphere is drawn into darkness, I find myself wanting to re-ignite that warming fire within the refuge of Silence, to do everything I can to place myself in the glow of it. As I wrote in the Letter almost a year ago, I sense that I am not alone in this yearning, and so in this December Letter we offer tinder and kindling to keep your soul fires alight, sparks from every one of us who has contributed to Nan’s luminous baby during these fifteen years. ~ Lindsay

*For the Beloved is as radiant as the sun,
as strong as a steel shield,
and invites each one to come,
to partake of the Banquet.*

~ Nan Merrill, from her interpretation of
Psalm 84 in *PSALMS FOR PRAYING*

Though sometimes we may feel we are lost, and though there are always many parts of this old world that are hurting and appear to be in deep darkness, we must remember that the Light is always present, all around and within us. It is up to us to turn, just slightly, and find that all-encompassing Light within ourselves. When we do, we find also that we can see it without... We are called to be Light-bearers, dear friends!

~ Anne, from January 2013 (Vol. XXVI, No. 1)

The booming voices are deafening and ever present, but it is the tiny twitters that speak to my soul. The varieties of grass growing in my garden. The patterns of planets, moons, and stars. Any tiny trait about my children. The small things matter. Seeing the small things requires some semblance of sacred silence.

~ Katie, from April 2025 (Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4)

...Darkness has a complex personality. If you'll allow a metaphor inspired by my own childhood: sometimes Darkness is a Ford Country Squire station wagon conveying a family westward on a December highway well past bedtime. Oncoming headlights—like the eyes of a never-ending caterpillar—pierce through the blackness. Pinprick stars gleam even brighter for the crisp winter night. But inside the wood-paneled vessel, all is warmth and breath: six voices belting out Christmas carols, six noses thawing while the heater kicks in, six spines tingling as cold's discomfort meets the holiday's electric anticipation.

In other words, sometimes Darkness holds us and moves us. And always, it lets us see whatever shines with greater clarity.

~ Joy, from December 2022 (Vol. XXXV, No. 11)

We are creatures who need light to see the way we do, to move boldly forward and around pitfalls. Light is linked in our awareness with the assurance of visibility and the thrill of creativity. For this we justifiably label it good and imagine Divinity crowned with it. But what if Light was beyond good? What if Light was really about clarity, recognition, being essentially seen and radically loved? Wouldn't that ignite our inner fire and forge us anew? In that crucible would we not be burnished to glow like lanterns in the dark?

~ Lindsay, from January 2023 (Vol. XXXVI, No. 1)

*Ask that your consciousness be filled with Light;
ask to be illumined to follow the path of simplicity
with integrity and inner sight.
Inspired by Divine Light and Love
you begin to express Divine Will in action:
thus will your journey be eased,
joy will nest in your heart...
A greater state of awareness being aroused,
you recognize the interconnectedness
of everything and everyone:
the unity of diversity.*

~ Nan Merrill in *LUMEN CHRISTI... HOLY WISDOM*