

## The Sound of Silence

Noise has always bothered me. The *kaboom* of Independence Day fireworks made me cower as a child. The roar of the State Fair midway sent me running in search of a saner space as a teenager. And as a 20-something, the frantic buzzing of rush hour traffic while waiting for a bus left me straining for escape.

As an adult, I may even bypass a sit-down event in the fellowship hall at church because of the rat-a-tat-tat of echoing voices raised to be heard above the clamor. And concerts? Fuhgeddaboutit. Rubbing elbows with 2,000 excitable fans, only to be pelted with the output of speakers designed to reach that farmer in Iowa who couldn't make it to the show—uh, no thanks. Clamor makes my nerves jangle, and I generally avoid it if at all possible.

Yes, it's a noisy world. But when loneliness creeps into a household, the stillness of your personal refuge can become a scourge rather than a solace.

After my husband retired nine years ago, we settled into a comfortable routine. He preferred some late-night video entertainment to unwind before bed, and I, the tranquility of a silent bedroom and a book. Jack accommodated me by plugging in headphones after 9 pm to escape into the world of Spanish television, and I sunk into blessed quietude.

When two years later Jack was abruptly called to his heavenly reward, everything changed. I suddenly detested the dull void that wrapped around me like an impenetrable fog. I started turning on the radio at daybreak. As soon as I returned from errands, I lit up the TV screen with the jolliest personalities I could find. And at night, just for the sense of company, I sat in the easy chair doing crossword puzzles until 11 o'clock, the tube flickering with lively quiz shows or British serials. False companionship was better than the claustrophobic sense of aloneness that filled the place whenever the sound went dead.

The TV habit stayed with me for seven years, along with the haunting fear that ugly emotions might emerge from the silence. Until...

I woke up one morning with a renewed sense of confidence. The quiet of the early hours had mysteriously become a comforting ally in my search for serenity. No longer an enemy. I didn't punch that little power-on button at the top of the screen until 4:30 pm to watch Jeopardy while I tidied the kitchen and made plans for the evening meal.

At 5 pm, off it went, not to be relit until the 6:30 airing of Wheel of Fortune, and perhaps a single BBC program after that on a given night.

Over the past 46 days, I've come to relish the hushed freedom that prayer, meditation, and lack of noise has reintroduced into my life. If the evening begins to feel long, or anxious thoughts threaten, I tune into a channel that broadcasts serene music and calming nature scenes 24/7. Great preparation for a restorative night of sleep.

Yes, it's a noisy world. But peace is possible. My hope is that you, too, find your way to a still, tranquil spot to call your own.