

November 2, 2016
(September Letter)

Dear Samantha,

Fran and I were walking to the train today when she remarked on a wall near the park that was leaning precariously under the pressure of the earth behind it. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall", I said, "That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, And spills the upper boulders in the sun."

Fran instantly recognized this as the lines from a poem by Robert Frost entitled "Mending Wall". Actually, she remembered it as the "same poet who wrote about paths in a wood". "Two paths diverged in a yellow wood" it begins – in the same style and mood we both loved. This poem is entitled "The Road Not Taken". You may remember it as the poem behind the bedroom door at your Grandma Shaver's condo.

This launched us into a discussion of memory, poetry, growing up, school, and our grandchildren that has stayed with me throughout the day. I wondered if your history and education includes the same exploration and love of poetry – and whether you remember lines from poems like Fran and I.

"I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding"

Another snippet of poetry came to mind as I noticed the birds flying overhead. I had grown to love this poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins (The Windhover) after our high school English teacher had read it aloud and pointed out the cadence of the words – like a falcon flying through the gusty air checking out the fields below. It opened for me the excitement of the way that words can convey both information and rhythmic attributes as well.

I have a lot to thank that teacher for. I've forgotten his name but remember that we used to call him Ichabod because his tall lanky frame reminded us of the Ichabod Crane character in Washington Irving's short story entitled "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow". He was the one who made even Shakespeare's plays come alive as he recited sections of Romeo and Juliet with both gusto and antics that had him striding around the classroom (and occasionally on his desk) with the full vigour of Mercutio or Romeo himself.

Were you taught poetry in school? Do you remember any? Perhaps your memory is full of songs instead. I remember being impressed with the way you can follow various artists as we drove across the country.

As I come across new poems and music that captures my attention I notice that I have to work much harder to remember them and most often will have to rely on Google or SoundHound to help me out. It makes me more aware of the importance of the early stories, poems, and music that are part of childhood – since they will most likely be the ones that remain over the years and as I have found, sustain a youthful joy in the emotional baggage they carry.

I suppose that being so far away from our grandchildren means that we have lost the chance to ensure the memories are there for you. We can hope, however, that someone else has been busy introducing you to these delights and that you have come across an Ichabod in your own classroom that will sustain you over the years.

Love,

Mending Wall

SOMETHING there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast. 5
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean, 10
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again. 15
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!" 20
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
He is all pine and I am apple-orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him. 25
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."