

Last summer, I went to a panel discussion at the Aspen Institute that included the novelist Ann Hood. In talking about her sources of creativity, she quipped that, just as there is a magazine called *Outside* that explores outdoor pleasures such as mountain climbing and kayaking and fly fishing, she would like to found a magazine called *Inside* that revels in indoor enchantments such as knitting, taking bubble baths, and doing crossword puzzles in cozy chairs next to a fireplace. While the event took place in a mountain retreat mere blocks from ski lifts and a nature preserve, the auditorium was filled with readers and writers—the sort of people notorious for not enjoying gym class—and the audience roared its approval. I was suffering from altitude sickness and hadn't slept for three days. I was thinking about the Late Night talk show host Seth Meyers who confessed on Jerry Seinfeld's *Comedians In Cars Getting Coffee* that he didn't care for summer because "everything I like to do is inside."

Not quite everything I like to do is inside. But I am pale-skinned. To be outside in the summer is uncomfortable and dangerous for me. I've suffered heat rash playing soccer and heat stroke walking the Minnesota State Fair. I burn easily and have been treated twice for conditions that were pre-cursors to skin cancer. When I was young and my family visited friends on a farm near Rochester, my brother and sister and the other children would play in the barn and in the woods, with horses and piglets, on tire swings and in creeks. I would stay in the farm house reading books and practicing the piano. When our parents took us camping—in forests and on riverbanks—I would despair over the likelihood of encountering spiders, sleeping on the hard ground, and having to live without benefit of a toilet.

And yet, somehow, I have become an adult who loves shoveling snow on a starlit night. I scorn leaf-blowers because they steal the stretching of the body in the autumn air; they trade the smell of oak leaves for gasoline and the scratch of rake prongs on the earth for an ear-shattering electric whine. On spring days when my mind is unwell, ninety minutes spent shaping the garden—pulling thistle and dandelion—or potting herbs to grow on the deck, or using a spade to turn the compost pile is enough to make me remember how lucky I am, and how happy.

Unless a day brings unusual fortune, the best part of it will be the walk that I take with my dog. We are all-weather amblers, Santiago and I: content to enjoy rain on our backs and mud beneath our feet, to walk slowly in the summer humidity and carefully on winter ice. We know how to get to the railroad tracks from our house, and to the beach where ducks and geese hide in the grasses. We walk through parks filled with plastic playground equipment and parks filled with trees three hundred years old. When I run errands, we go to what I call the Target Park or the Byerlys Park, spaces secreted behind highway sound barriers, with crumbling old stone benches, foot bridges over burbling creeks, swatches of daisies with their faces turned toward the sun, and deer that leap into the shadows when they see us in the distance. In the mornings, Santiago and I watch the rabbits on our lawn, who eat clover in the summer and bird seed beneath the feeder in the winter. In the evenings, we lie on the bed and watch the wind move the tree branches outside the windows; when the windows are thick with frost, we just listen.

For me, learning to walk barefoot in the yard, to hold a worm in my hand, to ride a bike along a trail to a place I've never been, has been a process of spiritual maturation. To watch a

J. Anderson

Monarch butterfly alight on a fir tree or stumble across the body of a dead squirrel or smell the snow that is coming at the back of a sharp, December wind is to remember that one is part of something vast and beautiful, complicated in its design, but simple in its expression, which is love. To connect with the wild world is to let go of the sin of engineering, to be, as Jesus suggested, like the birds of the air and the flowers of the field whose needs are met by God alone. I live by a line that Garrison Keillor used to close a Lake Wobegone story. In the face of human problems, he wrote, "Sometimes all you need to do is just get outside."