

A Sea of Daffodils

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I WANDER'D lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretch'd in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed -- and gazed -- but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:
For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

IN my first book about Anastasia Krupnik...and that's its title....she, at age 10, accompanies her father to a Harvard English class in which he is teaching this Wordsworth poem to his bored

students. Walking home with him afterward, they talk about "the inward eye which is the bliss of solitude" and the little girl realizes that her grandmother, in a nursing home, has such an inward eye....memory....that provides company for her.

I love inserting literary references into fiction for young people. Recently, in the book "Messenger," after the death of the character Matty, I quoted the second verse of this Houseman poem, "To an Athlete Dying Young":

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

To-day, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.

If not used to excess, I think the reference flies past for the young reader without slowing the narrative, but that someday in the future that reader may recall it in some other context, as I did yesterday, driving up my driveway here in Maine and thinking suddenly, "When all at once I saw a crowd, a host, of golden daffodils; beside the lake, beneath the trees, fluttering and dancing in the breeze"....

I am here now, beside the lake, beside the trees, for a week, after a two-day trip to Newport News, Virginia, where I spoke at a Holocaust Remembrance ceremony and was so graciously hosted by the Jewish Council there. This is the fourth year in a row that I have spoken at a Yom HaShoah ceremony and each one is different, each always very moving.

Maybe that experience is connected to the daffodils, bursting forth each year renewed, reminding us of vibrant life continuing after a cruel time.

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