

# Slow Down to Hear Your Inner Voice

By Chelsea Craig

Exercise and Sport Science - Fitness, Pre-Physical Therapy

University of Wisconsin – La Crosse

I hereby agree that this essay will become the property of the UW Board of Regents and that it can be reproduced in the public domain.

Most people today get wrapped up in the “busyness” that surrounds them and do not take enough time for themselves. I know I am a culprit of this habit. I plan my days so every minute is filled with activity; I never have time to sit down, relax, or enjoy peace and quiet by myself. I took a British literature course this fall, which I viewed as a course to fulfill my general education requirement. Going into the semester, my expectations were to develop a better understanding of poetry. Little did I know I would walk away from this class having learned a significant amount of information about myself and my appreciation for life. The education I received through this liberal arts course opened my eyes beyond academics towards life’s richness.

One of our first course readings was Thomas Lux’s poem “The Voice You Hear When You Read Silently,” which has since become an elemental part of my self-awareness. Just as specific movies or songs remain in my mind for years, poems have the ability to do the same. For example, whenever I hear Bonnie Raitt sing “Love Letter,” I am reminded of the long car rides to my lake cabin that my family makes every summer. Now when I hear a word related to Lux’s poem, I will recall this class and my sophomore year of college. Lux’s lines “so you hear the word loaded / and a sensory constellation / is lit” (ll. 24-26) make perfect sense to me because they show just how exactly the quiet reading of a single word inside your head can encompass your entire being and express so much emotion.

The structure of my literature class, including reading, discussion, and interpretation of poems, allowed me to understand Lux’s poem on a personal level, gaining an important insight about myself I was not previously aware of. His poem challenged me at first because I did not find it that interesting, unique, or noteworthy. However, the more time I spent with it, the more I benefited from and enjoyed each phrase, each word, each meaning, and, most importantly, each

feeling it provoked in me. I know I will recall this poem years from now because it permitted me to unravel its words, taking from it what I needed at that particular point in my life.

I feel as though I am constantly overwhelmed by other people, clutter, and work, in addition to the many objects and parts of my life that I already share with my friends and family. Sometimes I truly enjoy that company, but other times I need some distance. Life in today's society is so hectic; occasionally we want and need to be alone to escape that fast pace. Privacy is a worthy freedom that many people cherish. I seek time alone at various moments to further discover my true self. I have repeatedly wondered when can we be in the presence of ourselves and nothing else, when can we find what only we know and own? Lux's poem revealed this answer, showing me what only I have.

Lux's lines "it's the writer's words, / of course, in a literary sense / his or her "voice" but the sound / of that voice is the sound of *your* voice" (ll. 4-7) express that I can obtain privacy, this intimacy in literature, when I read quietly to myself. No one is capable of moving into my head to hear and accept what I personally hear. Only I know this inner voice. No one else knows its sound or meaning. This powerful and moving voice is enriched by my past, declares my present, and may even foretell what is to come. I felt stunned to realize this voice is the closest entity to me. It expresses my experiences, likes, dislikes, knowledge, and feelings at this particular time in my life. It is personal while extremely and emotionally fitting. No one can ever grasp its understanding because it is mine – and I can find it anytime I want.

This poem introduced a new method of discovery and personal acceptance that I can see myself using for decades. This single ingredient, the inner voice of my overall being, seems small but is extremely influential because it makes up who I am today, respecting who I have been and who I can be. Lux describes it as "your voice heard / by an internal ear informed by

internal abstracts / and what you know by feeling, / having felt” (ll. 12-15). This voice is the one thing I possess and never have to worry about losing. It is me. It is mine.

Discovering that silent inner voice was extremely exciting. Had I not taken this course, I probably never would have read Lux’s poem, which will remain a part of me as I continue college and advance to a future occupation. I have remembered this poem throughout this school year because as I read any work, the “silent voice” remains. From that small, intimate voice I can truly discern how I feel about life. Without this poem, I would not be aware of or pay attention to this key part of my existence.

Since I first read this poem, I have already had one crucial encounter with that distinctive voice. My aunt, a faithful leader and devoted friend, passed away three years ago in the comfort of her home. Her death was a shock to my family; it was difficult for me to understand why she passed away when nothing was medically wrong. When we went through her house, I found a book about faith that had notes in her handwriting in it. My dad let me keep it. This book has helped me through the mourning process. Several weeks after reading Lux’s poem in class, I was reading a chapter of my aunt’s book in the quiet of my bedroom. My roommates were conversing in another room, yet all I could concentrate on was what my mind, that delicate voice, was expressing. For once this semester I felt the calm and peace I had been seeking for months. I sensed some special force pulling me to a valuable realization: stop trying to control my life and let go. Had I never read Lux’s poem, I truly do not think I would have even heard that voice let alone be rewarded by my reading in such a way. This poem has led me to significant fulfillment. I used to try to control every element of my life. I feared uncertainty of what lay ahead, especially since my aunt’s death was such a surprise. Fortunately, this sensitive voice guided me to a state of serenity where I can let go of my persistent need to manage my life

and no longer worry. This awareness has brought intense growth and change to my life that will be remembered forever.

I cannot emphasize enough how essential it is to slow down to take time for yourself, not only to learn and grow but to relax and deeply enjoy life. Our society is moving fast and many of us feel we have to keep up. The liberal education I gained in this one college class showed me I can do more than simply live my life in terms of what I need to do and accomplish – I can find greater satisfaction and happiness in the small, quiet wonders of life.