

# Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

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A weekly poetry resource  
from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



## *Everyone Sang*

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;  
And I was filled with such delight  
As prisoned birds must find in freedom  
Winging wildly across the white  
Orchards and dark green fields; on; on; and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted,  
And beauty came like the setting sun.  
My heart was shaken with tears and horror  
Drifted away ... O but every one  
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done.

Siegfried Sassoon<sup>1</sup>

## **Reflections**

They are probably outdated by now—the digitization of our world at exponential rates over the last weeks has made even the morning's headlines old news by noon—but I still like to watch the videos that first emerged, as the coronavirus was ravaging that country, of sheltered-in-place Italians singing from their open windows a perfectly, beautifully discordant *a cappella* anthem. The video of their singing inspired homebound residents all over the world, country by country and city by city, to raise their windows and their voices in hopes they might raise their spirits, too.

Sassoon's poem, though one hundred years old and a response to a different kind of war-time than our current pandemic, strikes me as profoundly in tune with our present global crisis. Ours is a climate of fear and anxiety as we further isolate and the death toll rises, yes, but ours is a climate too of peculiar unity, hopeful longing, and some almost-forgotten love song for one another made all the more evident now in the face of peril. What a comfort that the song of a century ago might be echoed in a song we sing today.

I believe something good is going to happen, is already happening. And that one reason “the singing will never be done” is because there will always be something to sing about, always someone for whom we look from our open window to greet. Even our missing of life as we

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<sup>1</sup> “Everyone Sang” by Siegfried Sassoon from *The War Poems*, 1920. Public Domain.

knew it is a sign of our important learning, that we do in fact need each other, depend on each other, and look forward to our happy reunion.

This is not the first time our world has known serious danger and lockdown and it will not be the last. One hundred years from now, may the future say of us that ours was a time of great uncertainty and that ours was a time of love: the people were afraid, they stayed away from one another, and many got sick; but the whole world over, a miracle was happening. Everyone sang. Some way or another, they found a voice with which to make music, and everybody sang.

Take to the balcony, my friends, dear birds. Though you may weep a while and though it may be a wordless tune, sing your sweet heart out for all the good that is sure to come.

### ✧ About the Poet

**Siegfried Sassoon** (1886-1967) was born in Kent, England. While attending Cambridge's Clare College, he began privately publishing his poetry and would go on to become not only a decorated soldier but also one of the leading poets of the First World War. After being wounded in action, he wrote an open letter of protest to the War Department in which he refused further military service. The letter was read in the House of Commons and Sassoon was consequently admitted to a military psychiatric hospital. In 1985, his name was among 16 Great War Poets added to a memorial in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner; the inscription on the slate stone, penned by friend and fellow poet Wildred Owen, reads: "My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity." Before his death, Sassoon was awarded the Queen's Medal for his work.



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