

# On Sitting Still

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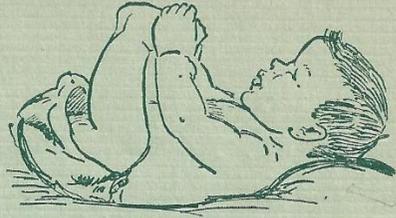
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d. 13 Apr 1961 age 91

Philadelphia

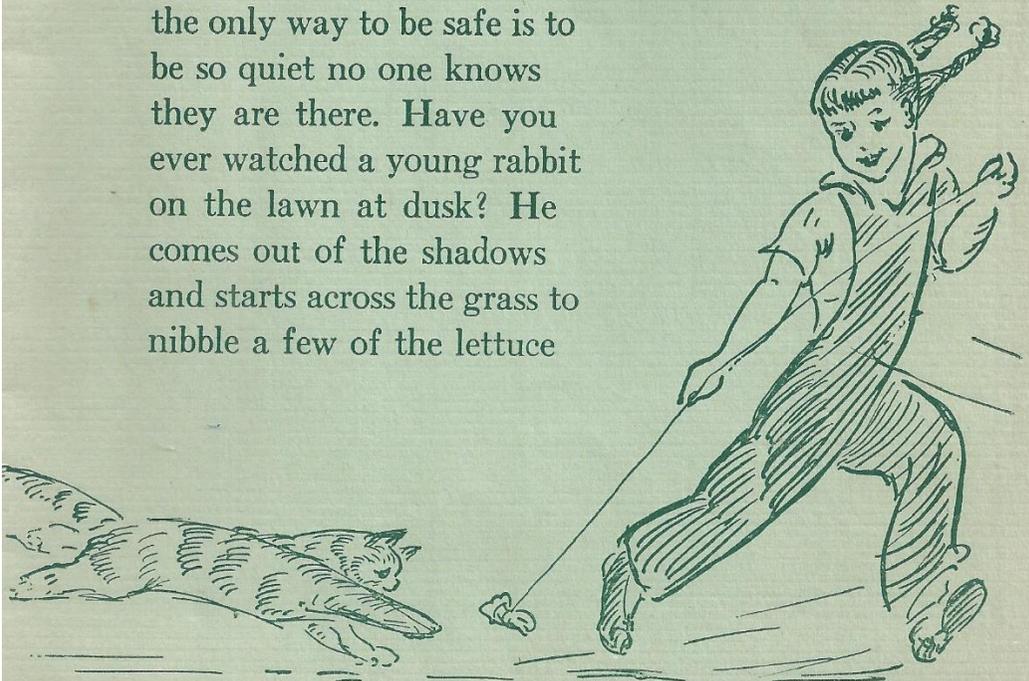
daughter of Alfred Brantington  
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## On Sitting Still

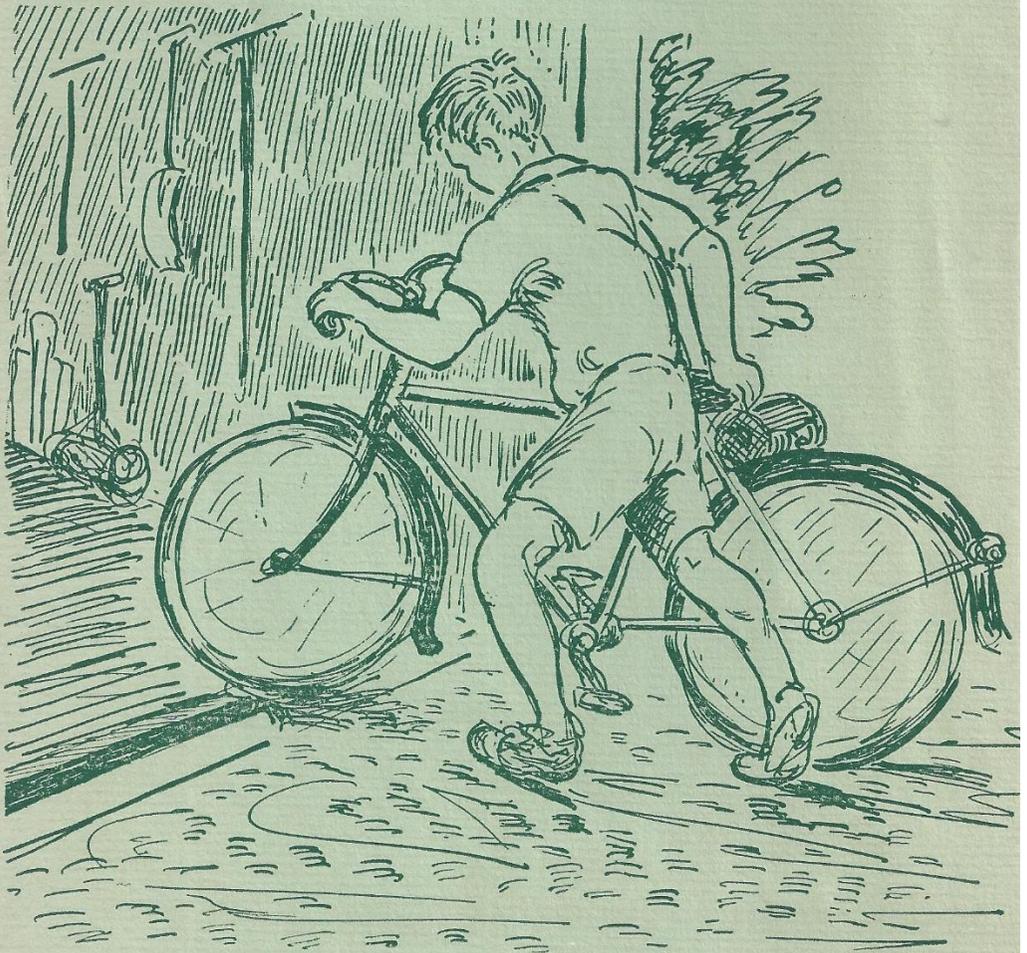


Anyone can wiggle and anyone can make a noise; even the smallest babies do. When you were a few weeks old you were only quiet when you were asleep, and even then you sometimes made queer noises and clenched your tiny fists. All young creatures like to keep moving as you will remember when you think of a kitten playing ball with a scrap of paper or chasing its own tail.

But little animals soon learn that, more important than chasing their tails is the art of sitting perfectly still. They know that often the only way to be safe is to be so quiet no one knows they are there. Have you ever watched a young rabbit on the lawn at dusk? He comes out of the shadows and starts across the grass to nibble a few of the lettuce



leaves in your garden. But he catches a glimpse of you as you come around the corner to put away your bike and suddenly he sits as still as a statue, not even twitching an ear. As soon as you have vanished toward the garage he starts slowly hopping again until—bang! The screen door closes after you, and he “freezes” again. Only when his world is quite still again does he finally dare to cross the grass to the vegetable patch and start his dinner!



Maybe you have read the book called *Bambi*, which tells the story of the life of a wild deer in the forest. When Bambi is a little, spotted fawn his mother leaves him alone in the underbrush while she goes off to pasture, and Bambi lies so still that his spots look just like sunshine filtering through the leaves.

The American Indians learned to walk through the woods when hunting without stepping on twigs that snap, or crashing into

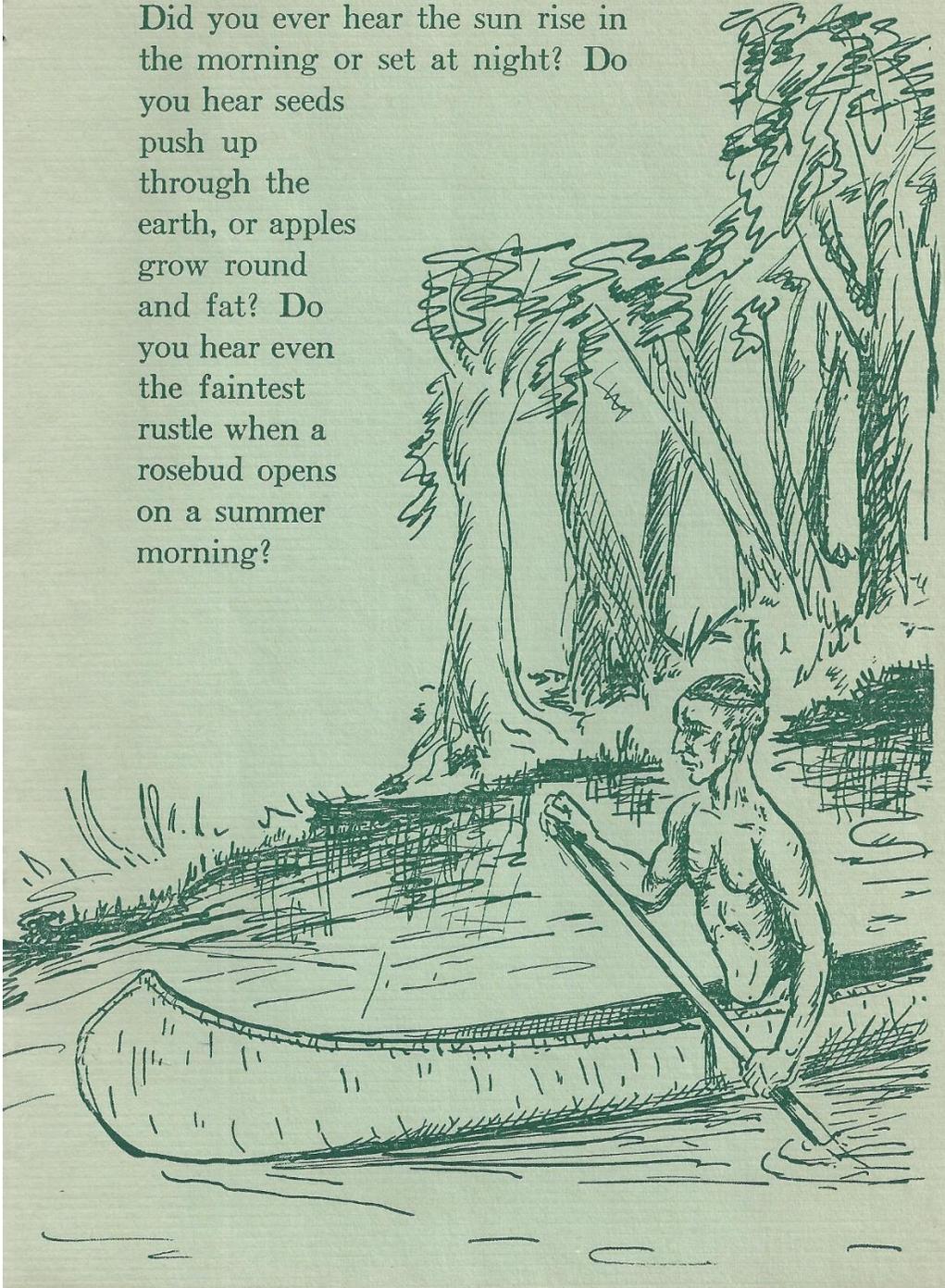


bushes that crackle when they break. The next time you are in the woods you might try to walk silently and you will see how hard it is. And the Indians even learned to paddle their canoes silently so that there was no gurgle or drip from the paddle to warn game of their approach.

Sometimes it seems as if the most wonderful things in the world happen in stillness. Great storms of wind and rain and lightning that destroy houses and forests make tremendous noise, but the most astonishing miracles of



creation happen without a sound.  
Did you ever hear the sun rise in  
the morning or set at night? Do  
you hear seeds  
push up  
through the  
earth, or apples  
grow round  
and fat? Do  
you hear even  
the faintest  
rustle when a  
rosebud opens  
on a summer  
morning?

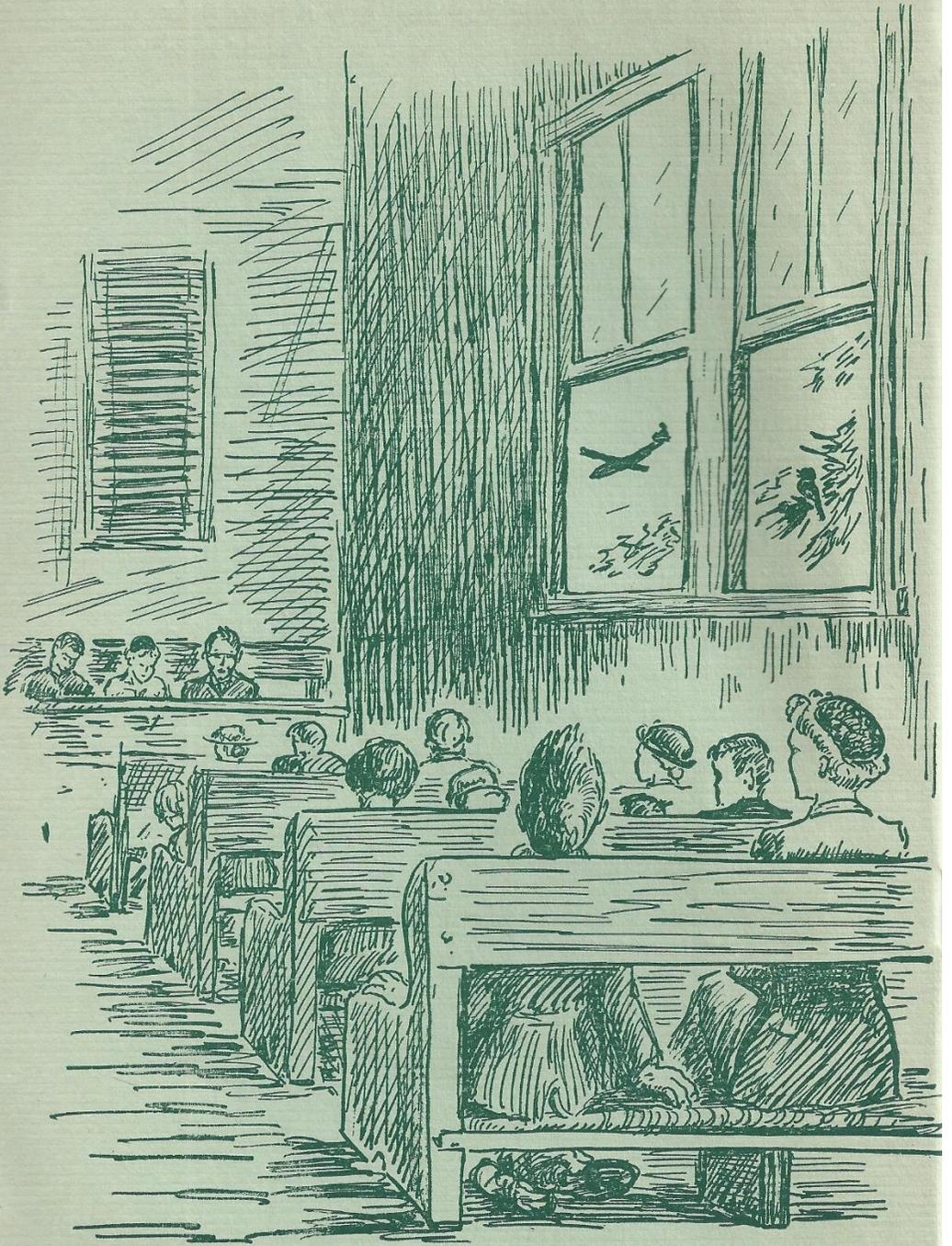




When you go to the store and buy a new pair of shoes, you find that your feet are bigger than they were the last time, but did you hear them grow? Of course you didn't, but all the time in the silence you are growing, and when you stop to think of it, it is a most wonderful thing.

When we go together to a Friends Meeting, we must learn to sit still, too, to give our souls inside of us a chance to grow, and to help us to find God. Many people used to think that their gods spoke to them in claps of thunder, or in the roar of forest fires, but the early Hebrews learned that God spoke to them in a "Still, small voice."

We who are Friends sit quietly in Meeting, when nothing seems to be happening, so that we will be able to hear that small voice when it speaks to us. We don't always recognize it when it does speak, but sometimes as we sit quietly watching a patch of sky through the window hoping that an airplane will go past, or swinging our feet just far enough to miss the bench in front of us, something pops into our hearts or into our feelings. "I really *could* be nicer to Johnny (Sally) if I tried, and

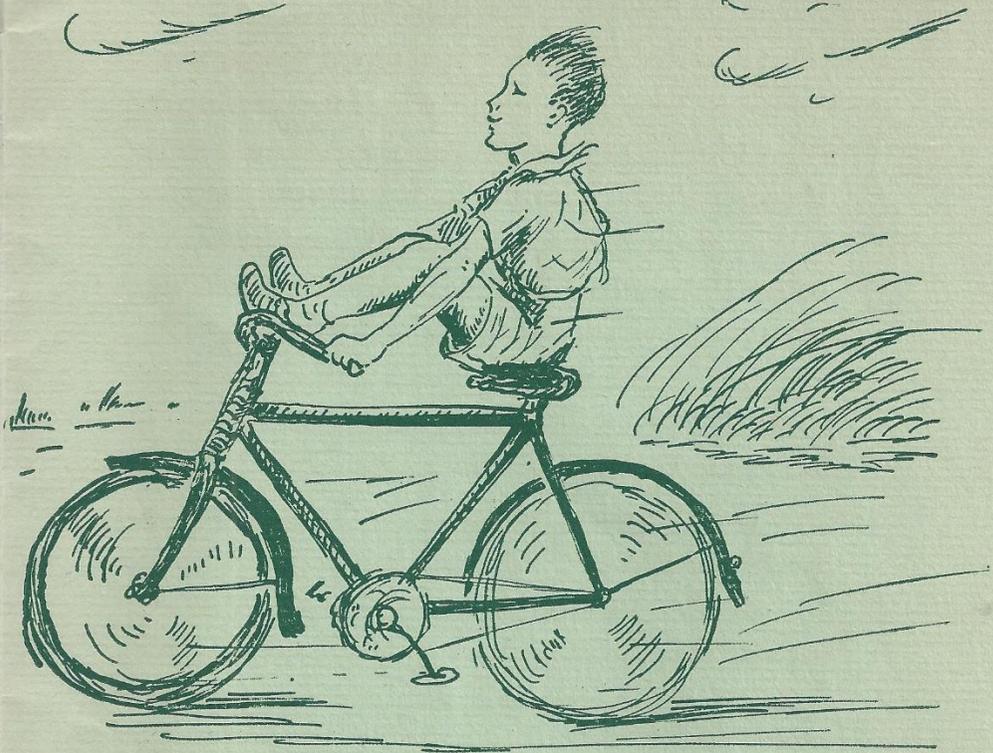


the next time it is my turn to be Captain, I'll choose her (him) on my side and see what happens." Just that way miracles of friendship begin to grow! Or, "Now I know why mother was cross yesterday. She was very tired, and if I had only picked up my pajamas without being reminded, it would have made her so happy." Or, "I like to look at that man who sits on the facing bench each week. He has such a gentle, quiet face. I wish I could look like that when I grow up. Maybe I can find something in Meeting that will help me to be like him."

Even if we can only see the branch of a tree through a nearby window or watch a patch of sunlight on the floor, or hear the locusts drone on a warm summer day, we can thank God for the wonderful world he has given us for our home, and make up our minds to thank Him by being more loving every day. So the miracle of love, and God is love, takes root in us.

But let's be clear about it that this is not an easy thing we are setting ourselves to learn. It would be much easier to whisper and giggle with our neighbors than to keep our mouths,

hands and feet quiet for perhaps a whole hour at a time. But it is a skill which we can learn with practice just as we learn to swim or ride a bike. At first it seems as if you could never stay up in the water, doesn't it? Or it seems just as hopeless to balance a two-wheeler long enough to catch your breath. But after you have practiced and practiced, falling off the bike until every inch of you hurts, suddenly something happens and you can ride! As you keep at it, you get better and better and then comes the glory of doing something difficult really well. Why did you stick at it so long? Because you wanted more than anything else to know how! Suppose you try learning to sit still the same way, as a skill to be mastered, just as little rabbits and Indians have learned. If you keep on trying each time you go to Meeting it will get easier and easier, and some day you will say, "Why Meeting didn't seem long at all today." And you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are one member of a fellowship of boys and girls and men and women near and far, that is growing in understanding of the silence, and that is listening in the silence for the still, small voice of God.



One of the best ways to help us guide our thoughts in Meeting is to say over to ourselves Bible verses that we have learned by heart. An especially beautiful one comes in the NINETY-FIRST Psalm which compares the love of God for us, His children, to the care of a mother bird for her nestlings. The fourth verse reads: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust . . ."

Often when we see birds in their nests we are standing on the ground and looking up to a high branch or ledge where we see a bundle of twigs with a sharp bill showing on one side and long dark tail feathers on the other. We know the mother bird is keeping her babies warm and safe under her wings even when we can't really see her doing it. But one day we really saw a mother duck covering her babies with her wings, and it happened this way.

We went to the duck pond one evening, but by the time we got there it was nearly dark, and all the birds everywhere were getting ready for bed. A mallard had settled herself comfortably on a flat rock in the middle of the pond, and was waiting quietly for her ducklings to come to her. Ten or more of the little brown babies were swimming happily around her, and we could almost hear them saying, "Just *once* more, please!" Then all at once they began to scramble upon the rocks and hide under her wings, which she had stretched out to make room for them. Just as the last one tucked himself underneath, and we thought they had all gone to bed at last—pop! out came one in front to drop into the water, swim

