News
EarthBeat



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by Barbara Banovich-Mroz

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Years ago, before taking final vows as a religious, I made a 30-day Ignatian retreat. The format is pretty strict — a complete absence of books, magazines, newspapers,

radio and TV, with social media yet to be introduced into the mainstream of life back in the early 1970s. Also, complete silence. You did not speak — at all — except to your spiritual director once a day for about 45 minutes. St. Ignatius permits you to have a Bible (you can only read what your spiritual director tells you to read for the exercise of that day), your notebook and your copy of the Exercises. And yes, six hours of prayer a day.

You literally go through withdrawal. I went from living with 17 teenaged girls in open residential treatment in Manhattan to the complete silence of the woods in Monroe, New York. It's an extraordinary experience, and I can't imagine it taking place anywhere else but in a beautiful wooded area.

It takes about a week to decompress, and one day you wake up and find a world around you that you hardly noticed before. You were literally immersed in the natural world around you, looking and listening to the sights and sounds of the woods. And yes, one can actually hear the grass grow. The birds and insects and lots of little creeping creatures on the forest floor remind you that you really are not alone, but are a part of this incredible creation. Your heart starts to beat with the movement of the forest.

The one lightning and thunder storm that took place one evening was beautifully fierce, powerful and pretty awesome. The next morning, the contrasting calm — the morning sunlight on the wet and shining world around me — had me picturing the first days of creation. And actually, I guess you could say, every new day is another opportunity to create, appreciate and celebrate the beauty of life.

EarthBeat reader Barbara Banovich-Mroz lives in Venice, Florida.

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