

# LINGER

365 DAYS OF PEACEFUL PAUSES

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Linger: 365 Days of Peaceful Pauses

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## INTRODUCTION

The three-story, boxy building was ages old. The wooden floors creaked. The halls smelled like polished wood, floor wax, books, and kids—and on a lucky day, chili for Frito pie. I was in eighth grade and on a mission to complete an English assignment: Go to the school library and check out a book in a different section from where you usually choose a book. The floor creaked as I entered the otherwise silent library. Usually I'd head straight for the fiction shelves, but I paused. Where to now?

Straight ahead was as good a direction as any, so I tiptoed to the back wall and found myself in the section that held nature nonfiction. I scanned the shelves, and when a small book caught my eye, I pulled it out, flipped through it, and decided it would do. And it did. More than I ever expected. It was a diary of sorts about the author's lively backyard, a world of birds and small animals and seasons passing. I don't remember the author's name or the title of the book, but I do remember the feeling the book gave me: wonder.

That was a long time ago. I've been a writer for years, and I don't know why it took so long to circle back to this wonder in my own work. Maybe it's because the floors of my heart have become creaky. I've tiptoed to the back wall and found myself (in more ways than one) in nature. So this is my offering

to you: a year's-worth of reflections, a diary of sorts, a meditative conversation, an invitation to linger. Linger simply means pausing for a minute or two, slowing down long enough to notice the present moment with all our senses. Linger refreshes me and enriches my soul. I hope these pauses will also enrich your soul and, perhaps, be a gentle guide to your own year of lingering, noticing, and wonder.

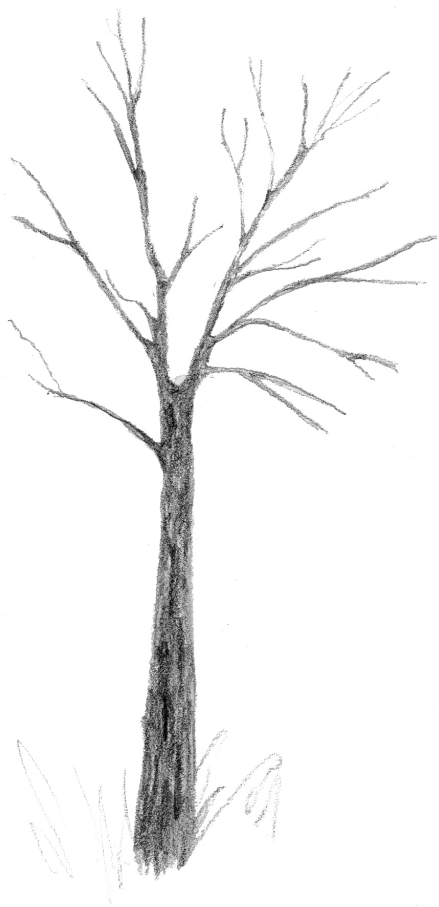
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Two notes:

First, since I live in the northern hemisphere, I've begun this book with winter. If you live in the southern hemisphere, you may want to start with the summer months.

Second, it may take you more than a year to get through this 365-day guide. No pressure. You can skip some entries and even double back and start again. Or you may be a pro at lingering and find you don't need my input at all. Use this book in whatever way suits you.

# WINTER



## JANUARY

## 1. WINTER SKY

The sky is blue, of course.  
Unless it's gray or pink or purple  
or green-streaked  
or golden.

The sky looks wide and boundless.  
Until it peeks over the shoulders of skyscrapers  
or winks through leafy branches.

The sky is higher than I can reach,  
or so I thought  
until I realized that, really,  
the sky begins at my feet.

Sky weaves around me,  
stretches up from the ground  
out into wide, boundless space.

I take a deep breath.

I inhale the sky.

– kh –

I'm lingering with the sky today, looking up at a bold blue swept with winter clouds feathered with ice. What is your sky like today? Inhale. Take a deep breath of sky.

### 3. WINTER SCENTS

Crystal winter air  
teased by drifting chimney smoke,  
rich warm smell of Yes.  
– kh –

I caught the whiff of a light floral fragrance when I stepped outdoors today. Was this a winter-blooming flower? An early spring? After lingering with it a moment, I realized that it was the scent of fabric softener dryer sheets drifting from a neighbor's vent. Still, I paused to appreciate the memory of spring past and the foreshadowing of spring to come. To me, the true scents of outdoor winter are chimney smoke and pine. Indoors, it's the aroma of chili pepper and cumin or cinnamon and nutmeg, traditional and comforting. And cocoa, too. Or if I'm in a more energetic mood, an herbal tea. All invite me to linger. But then, so do neighbors' dryer sheets.

### 4. THE SOUL AJAR

The soul should always  
stand ajar, ready to  
welcome the ecstatic  
experience.  
– Emily Dickinson –

## 7. BLUE NORTHER

[T]he wind blows strong . . .  
from the hills where snow must have fallen,  
the wind is polished with snow.

– D.H. Lawrence –

Growing up in Texas, I was accustomed to strong winds in every season. When an ice-cold wind would blow in from the north, we called it a “blue norther.” Pause and turn your face to the wind today. Is it blustery? Breezy? Barely moving at all? Linger with it a moment before moving on.

## 8. THE CLEAN-UP PARADOX

Inks, pencils, glue, ribbons, wire, pastels, stencils, scissors, stamps, paints, a variety of papers—all this and more is available for exploring and play at Art & Soul Nashville, the studio I often attend for art classes. A few hours of artistic discovery results in unique, soul-deep creative expressions. It also results in an array of messes to clean up before we can go home. I was never privileged to be in a class taught by the founder of the studio, Arunima Orr, but I was told that when it came to cleaning up, she encouraged everyone to slow down. “Slow down, and you’ll get it done faster,” she would say.



Slowing down doesn't mean moving at a snail's pace. It simply means easing back on the speed. The paradox is that when I rush, a task often takes me longer, because I have to stop to pick up something I dropped. Or I have to scrub something twice because I missed part of it the first time. Or I have to go back and grab something I forgot. If I slow down just a bit, I become more thoughtful and deliberate, and I often get it right the first time.

When you clean up today, slow down. Just a bit. Linger with it. Notice textures and sounds, scents, shapes, and sizes. See if you get it done in a less frenzied, more thorough way. And maybe even faster.

## 9. THE SNUGGLE FACTOR

It's a cold night. I'm wearing a sweatshirt to bed and adding a thick, knitted throw to my bed. There's something satisfying and cozy about putting on a sweatshirt or soft, warm sweater in cold weather. Or bundling up in a knitted scarf and thick coat. Or settling under a warm blanket. Or finding comfort under a comforter. I think of it as the snuggle factor. When my mother tucked us in on a cold night, she would say we were "snug as a bug in a rug." (I think it was Benjamin Franklin who actually made up that rhyme in a letter to a friend who had just lost her squirrel—yes, her squirrel.) Anyway, linger with the feel of being held and hugged and warmed. Pay attention to the experience, and enjoy the moment before moving on.

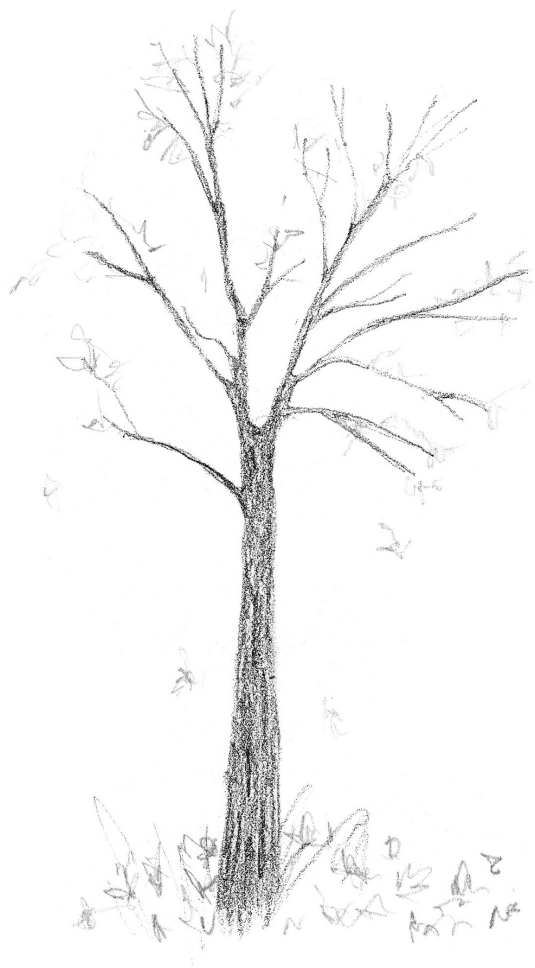
I invite you to join me as I look with quiet eyes today. Notice what piques your interest and linger with it.



## 16. WHAT SLOWS US DOWN

The author Mitali Perkins wrote on her social media that two things slow her down and “invite [her] to dwell in the moment”: deadheading spent blossoms and brushing her dog. In response, her friends shared what slows them down. On the list are cleaning crevices like grout and pulling weeds from cracks in a walkway. For me it’s watering plants, folding clothes and putting them away, and walking to the mailbox at the curb to check my mail. Some tasks call us to linger, take a deep breath, and check in with all our senses.

## AUTUMN



As I step outside my door today, I glance around to see how the scene has changed from earlier this season. The air is crisper, nippier but not freezing cold. In fact, it's exhilarating. Energizing. The still air is tinged with a drift of smoke, probably from a neighbor's fireplace. The



leaves on the mandevilla vine are droopy now, but with the sunlight coming from behind them, they glow yellow around their rust-orange veins. In fact, all the leaves still on their stems are either a crackled, dull brown or they glow in the sunlight.

The squirrels are still snooping around too. One is burying some new find. What interests you when you step outside today?

## 16. CHORES

Tomorrow is recycling day. I gather a week's worth of papers, cardboard, clean cans, and washed plastics out of their indoor holding bin and transfer them to brown paper bags from the grocery store. Usually, I swoop through this task, but today, I decide to slow down and tune in to the moment, to linger with the chore. I listen to the paper rustle and feel the different weights—the light, floppy newsprint of grocery ads;

## ONE LAST WORD

"I like living. I have sometimes been wildly,  
despairingly, acutely miserable, racked with sorrow;  
but through it all I still know quite certainly that just  
to be alive is a grand thing."

– Agatha Christie –