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"Peace is our gift to each other." - Elie Wiesel

Dear Friends,

What with heartrending news from all corners of the world—and the arrival of this most blessed holiday season—I've got peace on my mind.

I've pretty much always got peace on my mind, in part, because "Irene" is the Greek word for peace. Apparently there is a Greek goddess named Irene.

That's not why my parents chose the name for me—I was named for my great-grandmother Hannah Irene Dennis, whom, I'm told, "never said a bad thing about anyone."

I'm pretty sure no one has ever made that claim about me, though it IS something to aspire to. And, in a way, it's a definition of peace.

A few years ago a friend referred to me as "Serene Irene."

A few months ago a different friend sent me her "word of the day" entry, which was "irenic." Yes, "irenic" is an adjective for peace, a synonym for "peaceful." Cool, huh?

Undoubtedly I am generally a peaceful person. I value quiet and solitude. I am not prone to fighting or violence of any kind. But. My mind is a very busy place! Michael Caine's duck comes to mind: calm on the surface, but paddling incessantly underneath.

I am really working on finding more peace up there.

I think the duck I want to be is calm on the surface, paddling only as much as is necessary.

Slower. Gentler.

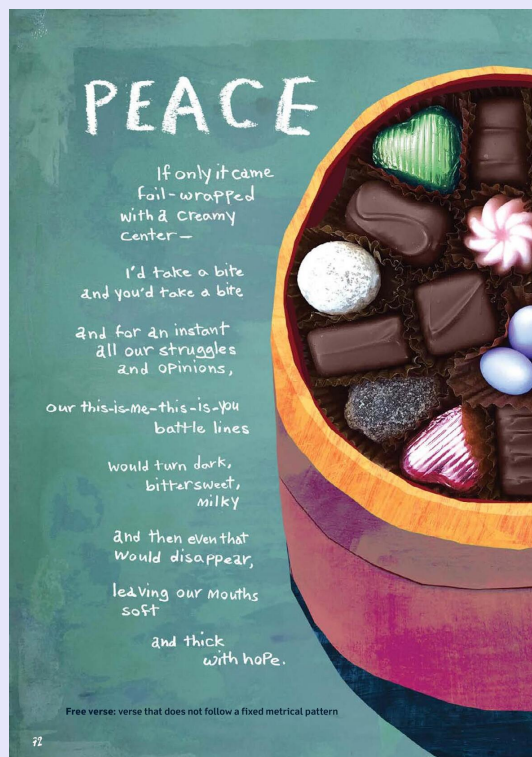
Feeling the silky water, not driven by hunger or danger. Just enjoying a swim.

As far as what makes me feel peaceful on any given day, I'd say long walks on our country road; staring out at the lake we are so lucky to live beside; watching birds and other critters; quilting; thrifting; reading; writing—sometimes!

And chocolate. :)

What about you? What brings you peace? Email me your thoughts!

Meanwhile I offer you a poem I wrote about peace. It appears in [Dictionary for a Better World: Poems, Quotes, & Anecdotes from A to Z](#) by Irene Latham and Charles Waters, illus. by Mehrdokht Amini.



For younger readers, don't miss [Wild Peace](#), which takes readers away from the hurry-scurry world into the forest where the animals share what peace means to them. Your heart rate and mind-chatter will slow simply by turning the pages that feature gorgeous illustrations by Il Sung Na. I'd like to live inside this book! (I actually wrote this book here in Blount County, where we are surrounded by trees and wild critters. We encounter deer, rabbits, and birds every day!)

Best Books of 2023

My 2023 reading goal was to "read all the books in my house that I hadn't yet gotten to." (!)

Y'all, I made tremendous progress! AND I also still ended up at the library about once a week to pick up books i ordered for research and pleasure...it's been a rich reading year.

Which is why I was delighted to share with Shepherd [my 3 favorite reads in 2023...and WHY I loved them!](#) (Not necessarily *released* in 2023...could be any year release so long as you read it in 2023).

And, this is super-interesting...check out [Shepherd's 100 Best Books of 2023 page](#). (One of my faves popped up on other people's lists!) Another of my faves earned the [National Book Award for Young People's Literature](#). Woohoo!

Links for Writers

[The Last Poem: How to End a Poetry Collection](#)

[9 Ways of Looking at Revision](#)

[The Benefit of Deadlines \(On Keeping & Creating a Writing Schedule\)](#)

[How to Mine Your Childhood for Story](#)

[Recipe for a Good Book](#)

Life Updates

My days and nights are blessedly full of family, lake, words, volunteerism, crafting, thrifting, gardening, traveling, cooking...all the things I love best. I'm so grateful. I even wrote a Top 10 Highlights of 2023 post that you can read over at [Smack Dab in the Middle](#) blog. I'll hit some of the highlights of the highlights below. :)

[Click here to read an update on my 2023 One Little Word "Space."](#)What should my 2024 One Little Word be? Hmmm...I'm thinking...

Cello life: I played as part of Cellobration! at the University of Alabama to accompany Miss Alabama as she sang "Stars Fell on Alabama" and "I Look to You." (video link coming soon!)

[The Museum on the Moon](#) was named an [NCTE Notable Poetry Book](#). *Thank you, committee!*

For those who (so kindly!) keep asking about my adult novel: I'm getting closer and closer! I hope to get it out to another round of agents early in the new year!

For the last book event of the year, Charles Waters and I will be talking [African Town](#) as part of [Hoover Library's "Stories of Exile" series](#). **Hope to see you Tuesday, Dec. 19, 6 pm at Hoover Library!** The event is FREE, and we will be happy to sign a book for you.

Wishing you peace and all beautiful things as we move into 2024!

Love,
Irene

p.s. Need a shot of inspiration? This story of [one astronaut's perseverance](#) will make you believe anything is possible...

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