



Tim Johnson

The Walk

Michael McAuliffe *Thursday, November 13, 2025 - 3:10pm*

The early morning walk with Scout, who remains a puppy at heart even as she approaches the age of two, is a duty, but it's also an act of solace. We both need the outdoors.

Once the smart phone is in hand or the laptop screen is lit, the world's worries become pressing, often consuming the meager carveout we made for rest during the previous night. Tragedies and sins no longer are allotted by geography or community. The cumulative effect is a constant gnaw of agitation. The price of engagement is unrelenting exasperation.

I wander near our up-Island home as a temporary escape from this communal anxiety. Scout likely is more focused on life's essential requirements and her fetch ball, which is held in place by striking white incisors and a steely determination.

The path before us is presently draped with leaves. Patterns of color crackle below us like a changing mosaic of the fallen pressed into the dirt. I acknowledge the possibility that I'll meet something less enticing than the foliage by stepping with added care, but that's not a real risk in these acres of forest and field.

We are fortunate this day. An accommodating breeze from the south acts as a banner, not a muzzle, for the surf hitting the sand over a mile away. The movable rumble of the ocean surrounds us, like a favorite song playing on the radio. The stripped trees of autumn shift and sway to nature's improvised melody. The morning's rhythms, its cadences, overtake us (at least they do for me) and I accept the calmness.

That the moment was gifted by circumstance makes it no less special.

We pause. Scout still has her ball in mouth, ready and willing to play, but she too seems quieted. No tick tock of a clock and no pull of obligation. How simple and enchanting. How available. How needed in this time of shouts and shadows.

Scout pokes her nose in the air, abandoning her pose in anticipation of another kind of favor. Her canine neighbor, Maya, is just around the bend on the gravel road, coming up over a little horizon. I haven't seen her friend yet. Scout vaults forward and disappears, ignoring my urgent, instinctual commands to stop.

I needn't worry. She isn't running away; she's bounding to something certain and joyful. I catch the lesson in her excursion and follow. The walk today will take time.

Michael McAuliffe lives in Chilmark.

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