

Quotes and excerpts from authors who celebrate the natural world

“The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness.”

— **John Muir**

“The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow, whatever the circumstances may be. And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles.”

— **Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl***

“...and then, I have nature and art and poetry, and if that is not enough, what is enough?”

— **Vincent Willem van Gogh**

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature -- the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.”

— **Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring***

“Wildness is the preservation of the World.”

— **Henry David Thoreau, *Walking***

“We need the tonic of wildness...At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature.”

— **Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods***

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

— **Henry David Thoreau, *Walden***

“The poetry of the earth is never dead.”

— **John Keats**

“Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.”

— **Cormac McCarthy, *The Road***

“Nature is not a place to visit. It is home.”

— **Gary Snyder**

“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity”

— **John Muir, *Our National Parks***

“The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat of the universe, to match your nature with Nature.”

— **Joseph Campbell, *A Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living***

“If we surrendered
to earth's intelligence
we could rise up rooted, like trees.”

— **Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God***

“If you will stay close to nature, to its simplicity, to the small things hardly noticeable, those things can unexpectedly become great and immeasurable.”

— **Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet***

“I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.”

— **Willa Cather, *My Ántonia***

“Alexandra drew her shawl closer about her and stood leaning against the frame of the mill, looking at the stars which glittered so keenly through the frosty autumn air. She always loved to watch them, to think of their vastness and distance, and of their ordered march. It fortified her to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them, she felt a sense of personal security. That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it. Even her talk with the boys had not taken away the feeling that had overwhelmed her when she drove back to the Divide that afternoon. She had never known before how much the country meant to her. The chirping of the insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest music. She had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun. Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring.”

— **Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!***

“There is something frank and joyous and young in the open face of the country. It gives itself ungrudgingly to the moods of the season, holding nothing back. Like the plains of Lombardy, it seems to rise a little to meet the sun. The air and the earth are curiously mated and intermingled, as if the one were the breath of the other. You feel in the atmosphere the same tonic, puissant quality that is in the tilth, the same strength and resoluteness.”

— **Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!***

“Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed ... We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in.”

— **Wallace Stegner, *The Sound of Mountain Water***

“So, now I shall talk every night. To myself. To the moon. I shall walk, as I did tonight, jealous of my loneliness, in the blue-silver of the cold moon, shining brilliantly on the drifts of fresh-fallen snow, with the myriad sparkles. I talk to myself and look at the dark trees, blessedly neutral. So much easier than facing people, than having to look happy, invulnerable, clever. With masks down, I walk, talking to the moon, to the neutral impersonal force that does not hear, but merely accepts my being. And does not smite me down.”

— **Sylvia Plath**, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*

“I had an inheritance from my father,
It was the moon and the sun.
And though I roam all over the world,
The spending of it's never done.”

— **Ernest Hemingway**, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

“Landscapes of great wonder and beauty lie under our feet and all around us. They are discovered in tunnels in the ground, the heart of flowers, the hollows of trees, fresh-water ponds, seaweed jungles between tides, and even drops of water. Life in these hidden worlds is more startling in reality than anything we can imagine. How could this earth of ours, which is only a speck in the heavens, have so much variety of life, so many curious and exciting creatures?”

— **Walt Disney**

“I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.”

— **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, *Nature and Selected Essays*

“The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship”

— **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, *Nature*

“The earth has music for those who listen.”

--**William Shakespeare**

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”

— **Rachel Carson**

“Choose only one master—nature.”

--**Rembrandt**

“Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.”

— **Frank Lloyd Wright**

“Thus always does history, whether of marsh [or] market place, end in paradox. The ultimate value of these marshes is wildness, and the crane is wildness incarnate. But all conservation of wildness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish.”

--**Aldo Leopold**, *Sand County Almanac*

“There are woods that are plain to look at, but not to look into. ... The taste for country displays the same diversity in aesthetic competence among individuals as the taste for opera, or oils. There are those who are willing to be herded in droves through ‘scenic’ places; who find mountains grand if they be proper mountains with waterfalls, cliffs, and lakes.”

“To such the Kansas plains are tedious ... “In country, as in people, a plain exterior often conceals hidden riches, to perceive which requires much living in and with. ...”

--Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*

"But especially he loved to run in the dim twilight of the summer midnights, listening to the subdued and sleepy murmurs of the forest, reading signs and sounds as a man may read a book, and seeking for the mysterious something that called—called, waking or sleeping, at all times, for him to come."

—Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*

“He was mastered by the sheer surging of life, the tidal wave of being, the perfect joy of each separate muscle, joint, and sinew in that it was everything that was not death, that it was aglow and rampant, expressing itself in movement, flying exultantly under the stars.”

— Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*

“There is an ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living, this ecstasy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness that one is alive.

This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living, comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame; it comes to the soldier, war-mad in a stricken field and refusing quarter; and it came to Buck, leading the pack, sounding the old wolf-cry, straining after the food that was alive and that fled swiftly before him through the moonlight.”

— Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*

“Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters.”

— Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through it and Other Stories*

“When I looked, I knew I might never again see so much of the earth so beautiful, the beautiful being something you know added to something you see, in a whole that is different from the sum of its parts. What I saw might have been just another winter scene, although an impressive one. But what I knew was that the earth underneath was alive and that by tomorrow, certainly by the day after, it would be all green again. So what I saw because of what I knew was a kind of death with the marvelous promise of less than a three-day resurrection.”

— Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through it and Other Stories*

"These people have learned not from books, but in the fields, in the wood, on the river bank. Their teachers have been the birds themselves, when they sang to them, the sun when it left a glow of crimson behind it at setting, the very trees, and wild herbs."

—Anton Chekhov, "A Day in the Country"

“The fish is my friend too,” he said aloud. “I have never seen or heard of such a fish. But I must kill him. I am glad we do not have to try to kill the stars.” Imagine if each day a man must try to kill the moon, he thought. The moon runs away. But imagine if a man each day should have to try to kill the sun? We were born lucky, he thought.”

--Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

“He always thought of the sea as 'la mar' which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things of her but they are always said as though she were a woman. Some of the younger fishermen, those who used buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats, bought when the shark livers had brought much money, spoke of her as 'el mar' which is masculine. They spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought.”

— Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

“You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after. If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?”

--Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

“Thomas Merton wrote, “there is always a temptation to diddle around in the contemplative life, making itsy-bitsy statues.” There is always an enormous temptation in all of life to diddle around making itsy-bitsy friends and meals and journeys for itsy-bitsy years on end. It is so self-conscious, so apparently moral, simply to step aside from the gaps where the creeks and winds pour down, saying, I never merited this grace, quite rightly, and then to sulk along the rest of your days on the edge of rage.

I won't have it. The world is wilder than that in all directions, more dangerous and bitter, more extravagant and bright. We are making hay when we should be making whoopee; we are raising tomatoes when we should be raising Cain, or Lazarus.

Go up into the gaps. If you can find them; they shift and vanish too. Stalk the gaps. Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock—more than a maple— a universe. This is how you spend this afternoon, and tomorrow morning, and tomorrow afternoon. Spend the afternoon. You can't take it with you.”

— Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

“I am a frayed and nibbled survivor in a fallen world, and I am getting along. I am aging and eaten and have done my share of eating too. I am not washed and beautiful, in control of a shining world in which everything fits, but instead am wondering awed about on a splintered wreck I've come to care for, whose gnawed trees breathe a delicate air, whose bloodied and scarred creatures are my dearest companions, and whose beauty bats and shines not in its imperfections but overwhelmingly in spite of them...”

— Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

“At a certain point, you say to the woods, to the sea, to the mountains, the world, Now I am ready. Now I will stop and be wholly attentive. You empty yourself and wait, listening. After a time you hear it: there is nothing there. There is nothing but those things only, those created objects, discrete, growing or holding, or swaying, being rained on or raining, held, flooding or ebbing, standing, or spread. You feel

the world's word as a tension, a hum, a single chorused note everywhere the same. This is it: this hum is the silence. Nature does utter a peep - just this one. The birds and insects, the meadows and swamps and rivers and stones and mountains and clouds: they all do it; they all don't do it. There is a vibrancy to the silence, a suppression, as if someone were gagging the world. But you wait, you give your life's length to listening, and nothing happens. The ice rolls up, the ice rolls back, and still that single note obtains. The tension, or lack of it, is intolerable. The silence is not actually suppression: instead, it is all there is."

— **Annie Dillard**, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*

"Caring passionately about something isn't against nature, and it isn't against human nature. It's what we're here to do."

— **Annie Dillard**

"I alternate between thinking of the planet as home - dear and familiar stone hearth and garden - and as a hard land of exile in which we are all sojourners."

— **Annie Dillard**, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*

"What do I make of all this texture? What does it mean about the kind of world in which I have been set down? The texture of the world, its filigree and scrollwork, means that there is the possibility for beauty here, a beauty inexhaustible in its complexity, which opens to my knock, which answers in me a call I do not remember calling, and which trains me to the wild and extravagant nature of the spirit I seek."

— **Annie Dillard**

"We are here to abet creation and to witness it, to notice each thing so each thing gets noticed. Together we notice not only each mountain shadow and each stone on the beach but we notice each other's beautiful face and complex nature so that creation need not play to an empty house."

— **Annie Dillard**

"The sea's only gifts are harsh blows, and occasionally the chance to feel strong. Now I don't know much about the sea, but I do know that that's the way it is here. And I also know how important it is in life not necessarily to be strong but to feel strong. To measure yourself at least once. To find yourself at least once in the most ancient of human conditions. Facing the blind death stone alone, with nothing to help you but your hands and your own head."

— **Jon Krakauer**, *Into the Wild*

"It was titillating to brush up against the enigma of mortality, to steal a glimpse across its forbidden frontier. Climbing was a magnificent activity, I firmly believed, not in spite of the inherent perils, but precisely because of them."

— **Jon Krakauer**, *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster*

"No domestic animal can be as still as a wild animal. The civilized people have lost the aptitude of stillness, and must take lessons in silence from the wild before they are accepted by it."

— **Karen Blixen**, *Out of Africa*

"The Kikuyu, when left to themselves, do not bury their dead, but leave them above ground for the hyenas and vultures to deal with. The custom had always appealed to me, I thought that it would be pleasant thing to be laid out to the sun and the stars, and to be so promptly, neatly, and openly picked

and cleansed; to be made one with Nature and become a common component of a landscape.”

— **Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa***

“Brian looked back and for a moment felt afraid because the wolf was so... so right. He knew Brian, knew him and owned him and chose not to do anything to him. But the fear moved then, moved away, and Brian knew the wolf for what it was - another part of the woods, another part of all of it.”

— **Gary Paulsen, *Hatchet***

“It was a strange feeling, holding the rifle. It somehow removed him from everything around him. Without the rifle he had to fit in, to be part of it all, to understand it and use it - the woods, all of it. With the rifle, suddenly, he didn't have to know, did not have to be afraid or understand. He didn't have to get close to a foolbird to kill it - didn't have to know how it would stand if he didn't look at it and moved off to the side.

The rifle changed him, the minute he picked it up, and he wasn't sure he liked the change much.”

— **Gary Paulsen, *Hatchet***

“But the beauty of the woods, the incredible joy of it is too alluring to be ignored, and I could not stand to be away from it--indeed, still can't--and so I ran dogs simply to run dogs; to be in and part of the forest, the woods”

— **Gary Paulsen, *Winterdance: The Fine Madness of Running the Iditarod***

“It's just that those things don't seem to have the weight, the measureless beauty of countless sunsets and dawns, the simple grace and clear glory of nature.”

— **Gary Paulsen, *This Side of Wild: Mutts, Mares, and Laughing Dinosaurs***

“The river and the garden have been the foundations of my economy here. Of the two I have liked the river best. It is wonderful to have the duty of being on the river the first and last thing every day. I have loved it even in the rain. Sometimes I have loved it most in the rain.”

— **Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow***