

Silent Conversation

By Janice Friebaum, © 2006

Do not mistake our silence for indifference.

Do not assume we don't care because we don't ask. Like
you, we hold much more than meets the eye or ear.

You were mute to free our spirits.
You kept secrets to spare us grief.
Yet we were tethered to your pain
and mourned for your losses.

How could you know your eyes spoke volumes
and your silence painted pictures?

How could you know that not answering our first question
would teach us to never ask another?

No one told you what to do
with the weight of ineffable trauma.
No one told you what to say to the kinder.

What if you started to speak and never could stop? What if
you never spoke and lost all memory?
There was no book to show you the way,
no light to guide your parenting in your orphan darkness.

We knew how thin the shells of your sorrow.
We felt the tank traps before your "no entry" zones. Nothing
separated us in our dance of mutual protection.

In perfect step we moved:
not-too-close, not-too-much,
not-so-soon, please don't push.

If you think we didn't care,
we thought you didn't either.

If you think we didn't need your burdens,
we thought we wouldn't trouble you with ours.

Quietly you despaired
that we may never want to know.
We lamented the history – our history –
that you would never let us have.

You thought, we thought.
You assumed, and so did we.
All to keep us safe, all to keep you unhurt.

This is our story, you and us.
This is the dance
of those who suffered, and their children.

This is our story, we continue the dance...
however flawed, however ungraceful,
protecting one another,
inventing the steps in our conversation of love.

If you now have answers
please know we have questions.
Together, we will write the guidebook never written for us.